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COMICS FEATURE

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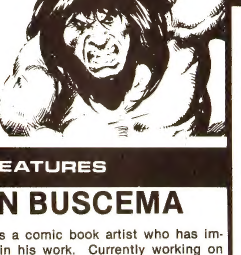

FEATURES

JOHN BUSCEMA

John Buscema is a comic book artist who has immersed himself in his work. Currently working on Conan for Marvel Comics, John has also devoted time to a comic book artists school and spends his "spare" time studying great works of art. His devotion shows in all that he does.

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MY PAL SUPERMAN

Satirists Jacobs and Jones take a poke at the most popular superhero of all times, Superman. Jacobs and Jones might be familiar to many readers as the authors of the recent **Beaver Papers**, their tale of the last minute attempt to save **Leave It To Beaver.** Here they follow Superman and his pal back to ancient Egypt and learn the truth behind the burning of the Alexandrian library in "Superman's Literary Discoveries."

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ON THE COVER: Conan by John Buscema, ©Conan Properties, Inc. Jonny Quest ©Hanna Barbera. The Avengers ©Marvel Comics Group.

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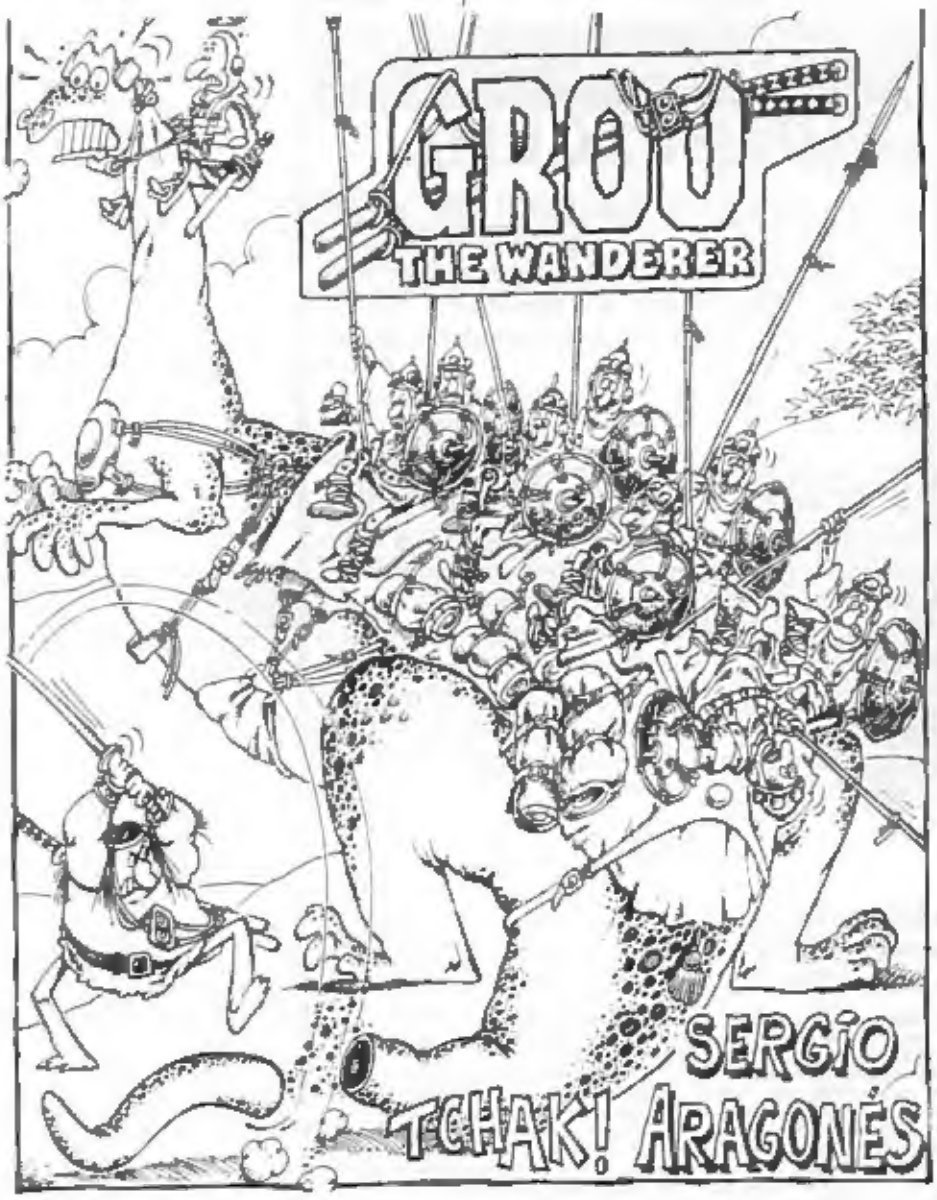
FEATURE NEWS

SERGIO ARAGONES BRINGS HIS BOOK TO MARVEL

Sergio Aragones, *Mad* magazine artist and San Diego Comicon celebrity, has brought his comic book, *Groo The Wanderer*, over to Marvel Comics. It will begin to be published by Marvel as one of their Epic Comics line. It will be the first Epic Comic to be printed on newsprint and distributed to the mass market along with Marvel's normal line of comics. The reason for the Epic Comics connection is because Aragones retains the ownership rights to his creation, just as do the creators of other Epic Comics.



In a way, Aragones will receive the best of two worlds. He will retain the same ownership and rights normally associated only with comic books done for specialty distribution and will receive the display and circulation previously only allowed properties belonging to the publisher lock, stock and barrel.

This marks the second time that a Pacific comic has left the fold, first *Starslayer* to be published by First Comics and now *Groo*. Jack Kirby has also dropped his books for Pacific Comics preferring to work for DC Comics.

DC INTRODUCES THE MONITOR AS PRELUDE TO MAXI—SERIES

The Monitor, an enigmatic figure operating out of an undetectable satellite, will appear in the majority of the DC line's titles by the end of the year. His appearance will act as a prelude to next year's maxi-series, *DC Universe: Crisis On Infinite Earths.* This is the newly minted title for the previously announced *History Of The DC Universe* maxi-series.

Created by Marv Wolfman, the Monitor made his first appearance in the *New Teen Titans #21* and has been appearing infrequently ever since. Although he appears to be a broker, providing super-powered criminals to those willing to pay for the service, the Monitor's goals go beyond the acquisition of wealth. The unseen character is actually the catalyst, launching a story that will span time and the various Earths comprising the DC Universe.

DC Universe: Crisis On Infinite Earths will premiere in January, 1985 and will be co-written and co-edited by Len Wein and Marv, with George Perez scheduled to pencil the 12-issue series. Vice President-Executive Editor Dick Giordano commented that *DC Crisis* will herald unparalleled changes in the structures of the DC Universe and will affect major characters in unusual and unexpected ways.

Continued on page 40

HEROES

THE AVENGERS

By James Van Hise

While all of Marvel's books have had changes rung on them throughout their existence, the all time record holder must be *The Avengers*. Conceived about the same time as *The X-Men*, it once again returned to the Justice League of America superhero group concept which inspired the creation of the *Fantastic Four*, but this time paralleled the concept much further by uniting several of marvel's major characters into one team book.

Besides creating a new title, this appealing series of "Book-Length Super-Epics featuring some of the Earth's Greatest Super-Heroes!" (as issue number one dubbed them), also served to acquaint fans of Thor or the Hulk with Iron Man and the Ant-Man, or visa-versa. For those who hadn't been following the other titles, *The Avengers* introduced them to these other characters and possibly created a new interest in them enough so that the reader would begin buying the other character's books. This is what happened to me, for in my case it showed me that Thor was a much more interesting character than I'd thought and so in 1964, I began collecting it and it quickly became one of my favorites.

It was no coincidence that all of the other characters in *Avengers #1* had their own series elsewhere except for the Hulk. Thor was starring in *Journey Into Mystery*, Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* and Ant-Man and the Wasp in *Tales to Astonish*. These titles would eventually be changed to reflect the

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character who starred in them, but like *The Avengers*, the roster on some would alter before the title change took place. *Journey into Mystery* became *Thor* but by that time *Tales of Suspense* was featuring both Iron Man and Captain America and it was decided to spin Iron Man off into his own separate book and change *Tales of Suspense* into *Captain America* with #100. *Tales to Astonish*, meanwhile, had added the Hulk as a back-up strip to Giant-Man (formerly Ant-Man), but the Hulk eclipsed Giant-Man in reader interest until after innumerable costume changes Giant-Man faded out and was replaced by the Sub-Mariner (who was the villain in *Avengers #3*). Thus Giant-Man (later known as Yellow-Jacket) appeared only in *The Avengers* after losing his own strip, but by this time the title was a popular one on its own and was no longer being used as a shill to popularize and promote the solo character books. Ironically, it was Ant-Man's idea at the end of *Avengers #1* to create the team and that title became his salvation for years to come until he finally faded away after almost two decades of struggling to find an interesting costumed identity.

Avengers #1 was a series of incidents held together by the secret manipulations of Loki as he struggled to lure Thor to Asgard for a showdown. Using the Hulk as bait, Loki frames the Hulk in an apparent train wreck attempt and then sees to it that when the Teen Brigade (established in *Hulk #6*) tries to summon the Fantastic Four to get to the bottom of the incident, the radio beam is misdirected so that Thor receives the message. Unbeknownst to Loki, though, the transmission is also picked up by Iron man and Ant-Man. All of these characters are introduced in such a way that their abilities and identities are quickly and easily explained to readers unfamiliar with them. Even Rick Jones, the Hulk's sidekick during this period, is shown reading about the Hulk's apparent attack on a train and exclaiming, "It can't be! He'd never do a thing like that!...No matter what!! Or...Or would he?" which establishes the uneasy alliance Rick has with the Hulk.

The story finally unfolds into a battle between Thor and Loki and of Iron Man, Ant-Man and the Wasp versus the Hulk. The Hulk and Thor clearly dominate the action as they're more colorful characters. Iron Man still had his old, bulky gold armor here and the Ant-Man was limited by his size to taking indirect action and using ants to carry out his orders. Even so, the Ant-Man was an interesting character in his day and when used properly in later issues, showed how interesting he could be.

The work here by Jack Kirby shows why he was the pre-eminent super-hero artist of the Sixties. His layouts and composition are straightforward and uncluttered, as well as dynamic. Panels are seldom crowded and often backgrounds are sparse to emphasize the characters and action in the foreground, which is important when up to nine panels per page are used as they are on several pages in the book. This was before Kirby started drawing figures which were more angular and with hard edges rather than the smooth human dynamics he did so well in comics in the Sixties. This one comic is an excellent textbook of comic book storytelling in the superhero form as it employs many types of action and character interaction.

The first eight issues of the *Avengers* were drawn by Kirby, although *The Jack Kirby Treasury* (1982) spuriously credits Kirby with every issue up through #16. (Kirby did do the layouts of #16.)

The first eight issues are all very strong and some of the best in the series. They also bring up the question of how direct Kirby's involvement with the writing was as he's stated that he plotted every book he did for Marvel. Once again, the style of approach to the writing changed when Kirby stopped drawing the book and the direction

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it had during the first eight issues diffused and lost focus. The first eight seemed to be following a thought out pattern. Beginning with number nine the title started becoming a bit aimless for awhile.

During those first few issues, though, a lot happened. Enough so that the reader hungered to see what would happen the following month.

In issue #2, a character called The Space Phantom imitated the various Avengers in order to cause them to fight amongst themselves, and true to the spirit of Marvel comics, the characters never confronted one another or demanded an explanation for such and so, they just attacked as soon as they saw the supposedly offending party. It was no wonder that even after the truth came out the Hulk decided to wash his hands of them because of how quickly they were ready to mistrust him with no questions asked.

This carried over into #3 when the Hulk joined forces with another misanthrope, the Sub-mariner, to take revenge on Mankind and in the process have a full-tilt, knock-down, drag-out, all-the-stops-pulled-out fight as only Jack Kirby can do them. Twenty-three pages weren't enough to hold all the action as *Thor #112* featured a flash-back to that issue of a fight between Thor and the Hulk which took place off-stage in *Avengers #3*, so the effects of that issue were still being experienced months later.

But issue #4 is the one which took the fans by surprise and became a landmark. Just as *Fantastic Four #4* re-introduced the World War II character of Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner, *Avengers*

Continued on page 42

THE ARTISTIC LIFE

By Stephen Bissette

THE SWAMP THING PAPERS PART I

Two panels from The House Of Secrets #92, July '71. Wein and Wrightson's story "Swamp Thing", and a shot of the character as he appeared over a year later in his own magazine, again by Wein & Wrightson. ©DC Comics

Howdy, again... I'm Stephen Bissette, penciller.

My purpose with this column is to take you behind the scenes of a monthly four-color comic. A great deal of unseen preparation and hard work goes into the creation of each and every comic book that appears on your local newsstand or comic shop rack every month or so. I can't say much about all the other titles out there, but I *can* share with you some of what goes into the work I do, along with that done by my partners in crime, John Totleben (friend and inker) and Alan Moore (pen pal and writer of Swamp Thing's adventures). Not to forget the navigation of current editor Karen Berger, previous editor Len Wein, colorist Tatjana Wood and letterer John Costanza. Make no mistake: a four-color comic book is usually a genuine team effort, and all contributions are of equal importance. Such is the case with *The Saga Of The Swamp Thing*.

I will try to show you how the group effort works, though I will tend to focus on the creative efforts of myself, John and Alan. I will also, of course, be limited to presenting you with my own point of view. The insights herein, unless otherwise stated, are entirely my own, for better or for worse.

The hard part, as always, is where to begin. Swamp Thing is *not* our own creation, though it might be argued that with the contents and relevations of *SOTST # 21*, we have put the character of the Swamp Thing back to square one: a new beginning, of sorts. It is important, though, to understand that rebirth in the context of Swamp Thing's 'true' origins and subsequent history. When Alan, John and I began our 'new direction', we had a wealth of past material to draw upon. The original *Swamp Thing* series ran for 24 issues, followed by appearances in *The Brave And The Bold, Challengers Of The Unknown, DC Comics Presents* and the revival of the character with Marty Pasko helming the efforts of Tom Yeates' artwork for the first 13 issues (followed by three issues worth of John's and my own art under Marty's scripting) of *The Saga Of The Swamp Thing*. (For a full retrospective of Swamp Thing's life and times, see: Mindy McAdams' "The Swamp Thing That Was" in *Amazing Heroes #11*, May '82, and her "THINGS To Come" in *Amazing Heroes #10*, April '82; also see Carter Scholz's critique of the Pasko/Yeates *SOTST* in *The Comics Journal #78*, December '82, pp. 41-46.)

If you'll bear with me for the rest of this column, I'll try to set the stage as I saw it. Perhaps you'll understand a bit better where it is that we are coming from with our own contributions to the Swamp Thing 'Mythos'.

It began for DC Comics and this character they own, The Swamp Thing, with a story Len Wein and Berni Wrightson drew in *The House Of Secrets #92*... the cover story, in fact. It began with a beautifully crafted eight page tale, wherein deceit results in

Final splash page of a Swamp Thing *© DC Comics*

scientist Alex Olsen's apparent death via a chemical explosion, followed by his resurrection as a moss-encrusted monster. A simple but effective gothic tearjerker with a truly sympathetic monster at its heart. Given over a year to consider further (and a strong response from the readers of the tale), Wein and Wrightson rearranged the key elements into the story of scientist Alec Holland, killed in a chemical explosion only to be reborn as a mossy, monstrous vegetable-being... The Swamp Thing! It shambled into its own title with *Swamp Thing #1* in late 1972... and so it began.

It began, of course, much earlier than that. It began, perhaps, with "It", in 1940... one of Theodore Sturgeon's early stories in the pulp title *Unknown*, and surely the literary grandfather of all the comic-book swamp monsters: the Heap, Swamp Thing, Man-Thing, sundry mossmen and muck-monsters. The story itself has had its share of adaptations into comic form, both officially (in Marvel Comics' *Supernatural Thrillers #1*, which hit the stands a mere month after *Swamp Thing #1*) and unofficially (September 1954 in Comic Media's *Horrific #13*, as "The Thing That Grew", which lifted the entire plot and some of the descriptive passages from Sturgeon's story). Its premise alone, however, is undoubtedly the forerunner of nearly *all* the comic book swamp things: vegetable matter engulfs the remains of a human being, thus becoming horribly mobile and intelligent—a monster. It was the thing, the mold with a mind.

It walked in the woods.

It was never born. It existed. Under the pine needles the fires burn, deep and smokeless in the mold. In heat and in darkness and decay there is growth. There is life and there is growth. It grew, but it was not alive. It walked unbreathing through the woods, and thought and saw and was hideous and

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LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

By Ron Goulart

CENTAUR DAYS PART I

Some of the publishers who jumped on the comic book bandwagon in the 1930s didn't have a very smooth, or a very long, ride. One such was the outfit that's best remembered under the name Centaur Publications. They managed to stay in business, using various company names, only from the middle 1930s to the end of 1941. Their magazines had some of the catchiest, albeit unwieldy, titles to be found on early funny books. Whereas the pioneering Major Nicholson was content with *New Fun, New* and *Detective,* the Centaur folks went in for *Funny Picture Stories, Keen Detective Funnies, Amazing Mystery Funnies,* etc. In our next few columns we'll be considering some of their varied output during that half decade or so when comic books were becoming big business. Let's begin with Centaur's best known title.

When *Amazing-Man Comics* first hit the stands in the summer of 1939, it probably gave the impression it was an old established title. The initial issue was number 5. The magazine also sported a rather unusual cover, showing Amazing-Man bound hand and foot with chains and taking a healthy bite out of the neck of an impressively large cobra. That certainly wasn't something you were likely to see Superman or Batman doing. But then, Aman the Amazing-Man wasn't your run of the mill superhero. A perusal of his origin story soon convinced you of that and you found that snake-biting was but one of his unusual talents.

Bill Everett was in his early twenties, and a veteran newspaper and commercial artist, when he created the Amazing-Man character. He had gone to work for Centaur in 1938. After holding down art and editorial jobs in Boston, New York and Chicago, "I came back to New York, all set to take the world by its heels—and wound up on the unemployment insurance breadline. I was still drawing compensation when I stumbled onto the comic book field." A friend suggested Everett go over to the Centaur offices. "That's when I met Lloyd Jacquet and Carl Burgos." Jacquet was editing the company's comic books. When he formed Funnies, Inc., the shop that produced *Marvel Mystery, Blue Bolt, Target,* etc., he took Everett and Burgos with him. Everett's first efforts for Centaur were two science fiction strips, Skyrocket Steele and Dirk the Demon. Next came Amazing-Man, which Everett, years later, recalled as being "the first *successful*

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JOHN BUSCEMA

One of the most respected talents in the comic book industry, the prolific John Buscema is welcomed at conventions as far apart as Long Island, his home for 25 years, and France, where his work is considered to be among the best in the world. He has drawn classic stories for *The Avengers* (including the origin of the Vision), *The Silver Surfer*, *Thor*, *The Fantastic Four* and, for more than twelve years, *Conan The Barbarian*.

By John Peel

Shores was probably one of the greatest draftsmen in the business in those days. I learned a lot from him.

John was born in Brooklyn "a long time ago", he laughs. "I grew up in a very rough neighborhood." He spent a couple of years hanging about the local pool hall, and seeing life. He is fond of telling stories about the types that he observed there. A large pool table dominates his room where we spoke.

"My cell," he jokes. That room is filled with an art-table, work stacked about all with the Buscema stamp of quality, bookshelves containing art volumes, fitness magazines, the collected strips of *Prince Valiant*, and the only two books he has left with covers, dating from his work of the early sixties.

He always wanted to be an illustrator. While he was still in high school he started training and going to night classes. "I went to the Brooklyn Museum Art School, which was running Saturday morning drawing classes. I enjoyed that, I thought it was great." His brother, Sal, is also an artist, and has from time to time inked John's pencils.

TIMELY DAYS

In the late 1940s, he started working for Timely Comics, the forerunner of today's Marvel Group. "I scrounged about for two years before I broke into the art field," he recalled. "My first job was with Marvel Comics in 1948. It was a different situation in those days. We had 62 page books, and you didn't do an entire book, you did a segment of a book. You had four or five artists working on one book. Some of the stories ran to four or five pages, some ran up to twelve. And it was great. Even if you didn't have the abilities to carry a book, the other artists carried the book and you *learned*! There wasn't much of an investment in taking a young guy and giving him a four-page story. If he fell on his face, they put it in the book anyway, because you'd have the really good man carrying the book. Nowadays, you're responsible for the book, and if you can't hack it, you've had it."

He liked this system of working. "It's too bad they don't do that today. They could bring in more people. It was a training ground. We worked in a large room, and I was exposed to so many different artists at one time. Today, no one works at the studios. Everyone's at home. To see different ways that people work you'd have to travel to people's homes and studios and look over their shoulders.

"I worked with Burgos, who did *Human Torch*. I worked with Syd Shores, who took over *Captain America*. Syd Shores was probably one of the greatest draftsmen in the business in those days. I learned a lot from him. Then there was Gene Colan—in fact Gene started about two months before I did. Danny De Carlo—he still does *Archie*. Mike Sekowsky—he was a genius, the super artist in those days. I learned from all these guys."

The days didn't last, unfortunately. "I didn't leave comics," he reflected. "Let's say comics folded. Back in the

Forties, when I broke into comics, there were dozens of comic book companies. In fact at one point I was working for four of them at once. And they all folded, except for Marvel, DC and Dell. And *Archie* books were the only things that were really selling."

John continued working in the field as long as possible, this time for Dell, on their movie tie-ins. "I used to do *Roy Rogers* for Dell for a number of years. Then I did a bunch of their movie books—*Helen Of Troy, Sinbad The Sailor, The Vikings*—that was a lot of fun. I worked from stills on those, except for *The Vikings. Spartacus,* with Peter Ustinov—I enjoyed that, and I still have all the stills. I think one of the best books I ever did was *Sinbad The Sailor.* But for some reason the industry was folding.

"People were blaming all sorts of reasons, like television. 'Television is breaking into comic audiences, turning them away.' Well, television was new, and I guess that it was one of the reasons. Another was that we were turning out garbage, dreadful stuff. So all that survived were Dell, Marvel and DC. You couldn't get into DC—I know, I tried! Many years later, when I was very popular at Marvel, I got a call from Carmine Infantino, and he asked me to go over to DC. I said, 'No. Where the hell were you guys when I needed you?'

"I went to Stan Lee, to Marvel, because I had been working for an outfit called Our Publications and they had folded. At that time Stan was turning out three books, and I think Don Heck was doing one of them." Don and John are good friends, living close to one another. "Stan had a little cubby-hole, and he was surrounded by filing

cabinets. He just had the three books, and they were still doing five or seven page stories. He gave me $21, $22, pencil and ink. I just couldn't survive on that rate, so I had to go."

BACK TO MARVEL

This was a rough time for John. "I just couldn't get any more work," he said. "Places were folding up one after another. I'd do a few books for a company, and then they'd fold. Maybe I was doing it!" He laughed again. "No, really, it was a state. I had no work. I started making the rounds of advertising agencies. I made the rounds for about ten months, and I had no work whatsoever in that time. Finally I hit it at a really terrific studio in those days. I was given an opportunity, because the head saw something in my drawing. I knew *nothing* about the field! But he said he'd give me a break, and he sat me at a table, and there I learned. I learned doing layouts, which is what I mostly did there. Before then, I knew nothing about painting or anything like that. So there I was, in advertising, and from there I broke into doing paperbacks.

"I didn't do science fiction paperbacks, I did historical adventures. I was in that field for eight or nine years, and then I got a call from Stan Lee one day. He asked me if I'd be interested in going back into comics."

Since leaving the comics field, John had moved to Long Island and married his wife, Delores. "I had been commuting from here into the city every day. Now that's three hours going, three hours back, door to door. And I was using the Long Island Railroad, which was an iffy thing every day. You never knew if you were going to make it back. Many times they would leave me half-way. The train would break down, and my wife would have to come and pick me up. They had no buses, no courtesy to the passengers. They'd just leave you and that was it. 'Sorry, the train has broken down.' I had had it, all those years commuting, and so it was either move into the city or get something else.

"It's funny how things turn up," he reflected. "I got this call from Stan Lee,

and I had no idea how he had found me. At the time I left Marvel, I was living in Brooklyn. How the hell did he get my number? He never told me—I still have no idea! 'I have my ways, John,' he said. He made me an offer that was pretty good for the time, and I liked the idea of getting back into comics then. They were doing three or four panels to a page, and this was beautiful." In the Forties, of course, there were considerably more panels to a page, and the resulting drawings tended to be too cramped for John's style. "I would sit down and knock those pages out," he says of his Sixties work. "I loved it. Stan said, 'Do one panel, two panels a page, it's up to you. It's not like the old days—you won't even have a full script, just an outline.' It was a good deal, so I went back to work for Marvel."

PURE BUSCEMA

Art is his first love, and he is his own severest critic. "What you see, what everyone sees me do, is *not* John Buscema. It's Jack Kirby. I've taken a bit of Jack Kirby, and a bit of this and a bit of that, and put together a 'comic book style'.

"I'm not saying that it was a hundred percent Kirby. There was John Buscema there! What I'm saying is that it wasn't *pure*, like Jack Kirby is pure. But if I were to sit down and draw the way that John Buscema would draw naturally it would be totally different from what you see. Consequently over the years, different books I've done look different, like a different John Buscema."

He laughed again. "People may say 'What are you doing in this field if you don't feel comfortable?' To me, it's the easiest way to make money."

He admits to having made mistakes in his approach to comics, and some of them have made him very unhappy. For example, "I've not been doing finished artwork but breakdowns. Consequently, there's very little control over an inker on my part. If I do a finished drawing, the inker can do just so much, but if I only do a breakdown, he can go in any direction he wants. I've been very unhappy about it, but it was simple economics. I make a lot of money breaking down pages. I can draw, five, six pages a day. Doing the finished drawing, I can only do two and a half, three a day. I seem to make more money with the lower rate I get for breakdowns than on the higher rate I get for finished art."

STRUGGLES

He sighed. "I just got to the point where I was disgusted with what they've been doing to my stuff over the years, and I said 'I'll take it over'. But I didn't realise the problems I was going to have. I haven't inked in years, and consequently it's been a struggle, an absolute struggle. It's not something you can just pick up after you haven't

What you see, what everyone sees me do, is not John Buscema. It's Jack Kirby. I've taken a bit of Jack Kirby and a bit of this and a bit of that and put together a comic book style.

done it ten, fifteen years. You can't just pick it up! I had thought 'I'll do it! I know I can do it—I've done it before! In a few weeks I'll get it.' But It's been *months*, and I'm still not happy with it. But now I'm beginning to get what I wanted. Because of this period, everything has suffered—the drawing, the storytelling, because I was more concerned with how the finished product would be, and I wasn't concentrating on the storytelling.

"I think I've got it now. Because of what I'm doing. I'm *happy* with it."

He is a dedicated worker, and constantly striving for improvement in his art. He works long hours, even when he isn't doing his comic book pages. "I get up in the morning and I go into my cell over there," he jokes, pointing to his studio. "I'm stuck in this place, day in and day out. At the end of the day I just don't have the energy to get up and do anything. I put in a long day.

"I was up today at 5:30, and this is my day every day. One day this week I was up at 1:30 in the morning. I wake up in the middle of the night, whatever time it is, and I can't get back to sleep. So I come down, have breakfast, read the paper and then go to work. At the end of the day, at 8 or 9 o'clock, I just can't keep my eyes open!"

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THE BUSCEMA ART SCHOOL

John's art is instantly recognisable, as opposed to the similarity of a lot of the younger artists. "One of the reasons is that they latch onto the most popular artist of the day," John explained. "The guy who happens to be selling. They're *fans*, you see. They grew up on comics and a lot of them haven't had any art training. Really, none of the basics. So consequently what they do is to latch onto somebody. When I taught at my school, I had guys who had graduated from art school, who couldn't draw and didn't know anything about composing. I'm talking about the *colleges*, not some private school that some guy put together. Some of the guys in my class were *amazed* at how the figure was constructed. They were never taught the drawing of the figure—simple draftsmanship. They weren't taught how to put a picture together. What they were taught was how to express yourself. But you can't earn a living expressing yourself. You have to learn the basics. And there are a lot of guys who can draw, but can't tell a story."

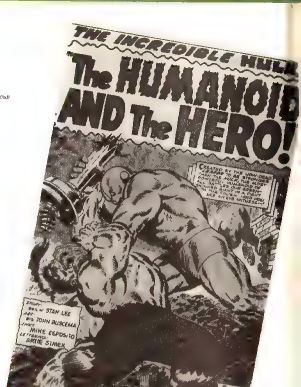
John started a comic book art school in 1975, which ran for three years in Manhattan. Why did he start this venture? "People were asking 'Can you recommend a comic book school?' Now, there is no such thing as a comic book school. No one went to comic book school, we went to art school. We learned to draw, to paint pictures, to put pictures together. So I got together with a couple of guys in the field and I said, 'Look, why don't we start up a school?' They agreed, but they chickened out. They thought they were going to commit themselves and fall behind in their work. And they dropped out. There were three guys. I'm not going to mention names—they know who they are!" he laughed. "I thought that maybe I'd give up the idea, but then I thought 'Why should I?' And I did it on my own. I taught this class. The second or third year Don Heck took over one of my classes.

"One of the great things about teaching art is that it clarifies a lot of things. Things that you don't think about. It's great—you learn while you teach. I loved it. But it didn't pay for me. It's a *tremendous* trip for me, going into the city. After a day of work, I'd quit at four and leave the house. The class would begin at seven o'clock, and run for three hours until ten o'clock. It was too long a day, three times a week. It was too tiring."

From these classes, there emerged people who are now working in the industry—Bob Hall, who works on John's old book, *The Avengers*; Juan Ortiz; Richard Howell and a few others. The three years were by no means wasted.

STORYTELLING

"I despise the superheroes!" he proclaimed loudly. "I cannot draw them without vomiting!" He broke into deep



laughter at his remarks. His renditions of many of the superheroes have been much praised, but he doesn't see them that way. "I hated every minute of it," he confessed. "The only book I ever worked on that I really enjoyed was *Thor*. But after a while even that was a hack thing. I enjoyed it when they were in Asgard, but whenever they brought him down to Earth, it became a bore. I don't like drawing cars or buildings. I like drawing buildings that I can make up."

The essence of his craft, as John sees it, is storytelling. "I've worked with a lot of writers," he remarked. "I've worked with Stan Lee and with Roy Thomas. To me, they're two of the best writers in the business. They each have a different philosophy. Stan wanted a story to *flow*, so you could read the story without having to look at the dialog or the captions. He always felt that the reader could pick up the book and flip the pages and tell what the story was about. Roy always felt the opposite. He said, 'If the pictures can tell the story, what's the point of the writer?' I tried to work with both of them, but I tend to lean towards Stan's way of doing a book. Whether it's right or wrong, that's the way I've been doing it.

"I think that if you leave it to an *experienced* artist, then *he's* the guy who's telling the story. I think that the most successful strips are the ones written and drawn by the same man.

"The thing I find with writers is that they don't *visualize* what they are writing. If I tell a story, I visualize it before I draw it. Now, I'll get a script from one of the writers, and he'll say 'so-and-so takes out a knife and stabs someone'. But we've already established that the knife was dropped in a canyon somewhere. The writer doesn't remember that because he doesn't *visualize* it."

BUSCEMA'S HULK

Conan is his big love. Buscema speaks with enjoyment of the original stories of Robert E. Howard. "When I was working from the Howard books, *Conan* was the greatest joy in my life," he admitted. "He wrote everything. I could *see* the dungeon, I could *see* the castle, I could *see* the people, the atmosphere. Unfortunately, again, the biggest mistake I ever did was that I didn't do the finished drawings on those stories or ink them. They gave them to inkers who did whatever they wanted with those pages, and they destroyed the entire concept. I wish I could do every one of those stories again, working from the Howard books.

"It was like I didn't have to draw them. I just sat there and *swiped* what Howard gave me in that book. It was like looking at a movie. He's great; I love his works. The people who've taken over *Conan*, like Carter and deCamp, and all the other people, they're absolutely lost. They don't understand Conan. The only one who ever did was Howard. He could describe a scene in sentences where it would take pages for other people to do it."

After twelve years on *Conan*, how does he feel? "It's getting a little dull for me now," he confessed. "It doesn't *have* to be boring, but the writers do not give me the plots that I think there should be. It's always the same situations, over and over. They don't

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Three of John Buscema's classic covers

© 1986 Marvel Comics Group

have the same imagination that Howard has." He laughed. "But then again, few people do!

"I enjoyed Roy Thomas' *Conan* plots. I didn't always *agree* with them! We'd sometimes get on the phone and argue them over. I felt that Conan was a very strong person, more than the average guy, and Roy was always afraid that I'd make him into a superhero, take him away from the real world and have him with almost the strength of a Spider-Man. But I feel that there are people today who are so strong it's unbelievable. I was just reading the other day of a guy who lifted six thousand pounds with his back. This is unbelievable Six thousand pounds! He had a back board with a group of people sitting on it, got under it and lifted it off the ground. Now, this is in the realm of a Superman or a Spider-Man. But Roy Thomas was always afraid of that.

One thing I feel is that there's no point in having a very strong guy like Conan, with all this action going on, and always have him use a sword. You don't need a powerful man for that. Give Conan things to do with his strength—then it's justified that he's big and strong. But they *still* don't do that. If he gets into a fight, he's going to be using a sword.

GRAPHIC NOVEL

"Now, I've plotted a 64 page book that's going to be turned into a graphic novel. I'm going to draw and ink it and everything," he chuckled at the thought. "They gave me an advance on it three years ago, and I haven't started it yet. One of these days they're going to take me to court or something." He laughed. "Anyhow, I have scenes in there where Conan loses his sword and he's going to get out of this situation with his strength. With his ability to jump, and leap, and to crush skulls with one punch, just as Howard envisaged. In one of the books, he crushes a guy's skull with one blow. No one, in the ring, has ever crushed anyone's skull in all the years of fighting. Even the bare-knuckle days; no one. So Conan is super human."

John came to the *Conan* series after it had been started. The first artist on the strip was Barry Smith, and he created the feel to the series that it still possesses. John doesn't like the way that it was done. "It was wrong," he said. "I think it was too civilised. This story takes place *thousands* of years ago, before recorded history. I'm not saying that they should have had people living in caves, but there should have been a primitive look involved. But the buildings that were established in these books were very ornate. It shouldn't be that way. It was a wrong concept. I visualize something different.

"Now when I do this graphic novel, I'm going to design my own buildings. I'm going back to the Norse way, where they used wood and skins. This is the way that I think the buildings should have been constructed in the Conan books. Not with plaster and mortar and curlicules all over the place, and art deco. Art deco? No! It doesn't have the flavor of *Conan* as I visualized it when I first saw it.

"Conan is fantasy," he explained. "They just don't seem to realise it's fantasy. There's a lot of magic in it, a lot of things coming up from under the ground and so on."

ROYALTY PROBLEMS

"There is a problem," he revealed. "A lot of writers don't want to work on *Conan* because the royalties earned are less than on the superhero books. These royalties can amount to quite a sum of money. But they don't seem to realize that if we can do a damned good job on *Conan*, the royalties will go up.

"We turn out so many comics that you can't expect a classic every time. But let's not have every book with him riding on a pony! There are other ways to have him go from one place to another. I could pick up any ten Conan books that I've done, and half a dozen will have camping scenes. Or they're on a horse going from one place to another. It's not necessary.

"Humor? There's no such thing as humor in these books! And we used to do it years ago with Stan Lee. Stan always wanted to inject maybe a panel or something, a bit of humor.

"One sequence I did recently, Conan is trying to make out with two girls on a balcony, and this little guy comes running by and knocks him over. He's running away from a couple of bullies, who catch him. For one reason or another, they're going to cut him up. Meanwhile the girls walk away, because they see the fight, and Conan is really upset, losing his chance. He turns around and sees this little guy being taken advantage of, and he says 'Great, beat the hell out of him.' But when the bullies pull out knives and cut the little guy's nose, Conan beats them up. I have this little guy walking 'round through the whole story with his nose bandaged up. It's no big deal, but it's a little something *different*. And Conan tries to get rid of the little guy, but he's following Conan all over. He's a leech. It's been done a thousand times, I know, but not in *Conan*. We never do it in *Conan*."

Continued on page 63

MY PAL SUPERMAN

(Superman and other characters © DC)

SUPERMAN'S LITERARY DISCOVERIES By Jacobs and Jones

I opened the window, moved aside, and pressed my emergency signal watch. Superman zoomed into the room before I could say Great Caesar's Ghost.

"What's the trouble, Will?" Superman said.

"I lost my damn keys," I said.

"Where did you last see them?" he asked.

"I had them when I drove home after dinner," I said. "But I can't for the life of me remember what I did with them after that."

"That's easily taken care of, Will. What time did you get home?"

"About 6:30."

"Well then, I'll just fly back through the time barrier and see what you did with them."

"But Superman, if you tamper with the past, couldn't that screw up the future somehow?"

"No, Will," he said. "I've tried before to change the course of history, but it just doesn't work. That's why I felt confident, for example, in banishing Titano the Super-Ape to the distant past, knowing that even his great size and kryptonite vision would have no effect on the millenia to come."

"Okay then, Kal, if you don't mind," I said.

Superman vanished in a blur and reappeared instants later. "Look in the garbage, Will", he said.

I checked the trash, and sure enough, under the Burger King bag, there were my keys.

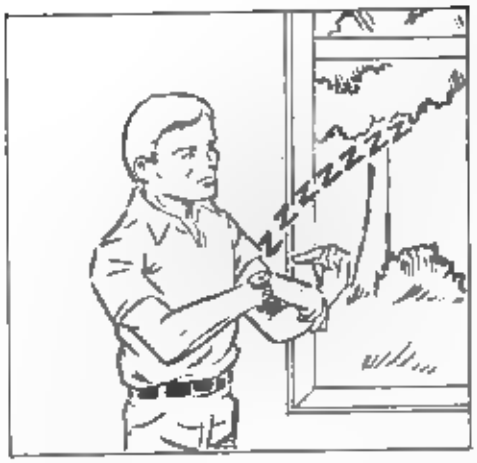
"You had let so much trash accumulate in your car," said Superman, "that when you brought it up, your hands were kept occupied and you failed to put your keys in your pocket. You accidentally dropped them into the garbage along with the rest of the trash."

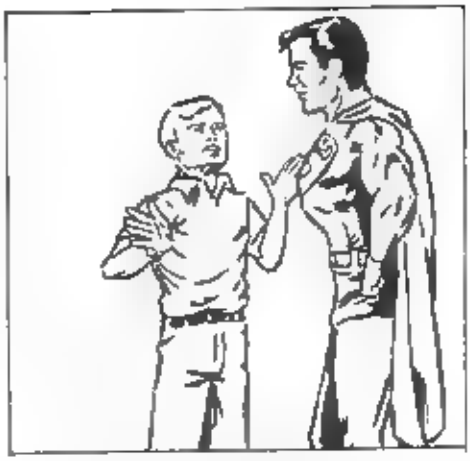
"Thanks, pal," I said. "Listen, I hope you don't mind me using my signal watch for something this insignificant."

"No, Will. Feel free to summon me by your signal watch for any reason, not only because you're menaced by my super-foes or threatened by natural catastrophe. And the same goes for the toll-free number at my Fortress of Solitude in the Arctic."

"Appreciate it, Kal," I said. "Hey, now that you're here, can you stay a while? Or do you have to run?"

"Fly, Will. I don't think I do, but let me take a quick check." He turned his body in a complete circle, holding his head at an odd angle. "Everything looks fine. There's a comet hurtling toward Earth, but I see my pal Green Lantern is already zipping off to dispatch it."





"That's great. Why don't you take a load off your feet and we'll talk." I mixed a couple of Manhattans and joined Superman in the living room. I sat down and lit up a cigarette.

CHATTING WITH KAL-EL

"Let me have one of those," Superman said.

"I didn't know you smoked," I said.

"Although I can live interminably without food and drink," Superman explained, "I find I need a little tobacco now and then. It helps me relax." He took a cigarette and set it between his lips. I offered him my lighter, but he waved it away and lit the cigarette with his heat vision.

"I hope I'm not giving you my bad habits," I said.

"Nonsense, Will. Friends always pick up one another's habits and attributes."

"Depends on how you look at it, Kal. Have I started flying at interstellar speed, stopping bullets with my indestructible chest, or battling such super-menaces as the space-villain Brainiac?"

"No," Superman said. "But you certainly are picking up my speech-patterns..."

"Heaven forbid," I said.

Superman took a sip of his drink and said, "Good Metropolis, Will."

"Manhattan," I said.

"Right. By the way, Will, are there any more books you can recommend for me to read?"

What a guy. Only last week I had recommended the entire Britannica *Great Books* series to him, and he had apparently finished them all.

"What did you think of the *Great Books*, Kal?"

"I surely enjoyed those comedies of Aristophanes," he said. "I laughed so hard reading *The Frogs* that I would have busted a gut, if my internal organs, like my bodily exterior, were not invulnerable."

"It's a pity that not all of Aristophanes' works have survived."

"You mean some of them have been lost to the sands of time?"

"You could put it that way," I explained, "All of the great Greek dramatists—the tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides and the comedians Aristophanes and Menander—have been shown to have written far more plays than still survive. One of the great calamities of ancient history was the unexplained destruction by fire of the great library in Alexandria during Caesar's campaign in 48 B.C. which resulted in the eternal loss of innumerable classics of literature and philosophy."

"My goodness, Will, I had no idea. What a tragedy!" exclaimed Superman, rising from his seat. "All those lost works must have been great. One thing I noticed was that I enjoyed everything I read by the ancient authors. They never seemed to write a bad play."

"Sure," I said. "They weren't like the hacks we have today. In the ancient world, economics and art were in greater harmony. A writer could be true to his vision then. But in the twentieth century, some of our finest writers have prostituted themselves. Look at Norman Mailer, Truman Capote and John Irving."

"But Will, I thought you told me that John Irving had always been bad."

"That's true," I said.

Superman shook his head. "To think of all the times I've visited ancient Alexandria without once stopping by the library. I guess I assumed that since I didn't reside there, I could never be issued a library card."

"It would be interesting for you just to sit in the library and peruse those ancient texts," I said. "Perhaps after you return to the present you can stop by and tell me what they're all about."

"I have a better idea than that, Will. We can just zip off to 48 B.C. together and you can have a look around for yourself."

"But wouldn't I be buffeted to death by the temporal winds that rage along the time-stream?" I asked.

"You see?" said Superman. "You are beginning to talk like me."

"Okay," I said. "Wouldn't the time-stream beat the crap out of me?"

"Oh no, Will. I wouldn't let that happen to you. I'll just wrap you in my indestructible cape, as I do with my pal Jimmy, take you under my arm and fly you there safe and sound."

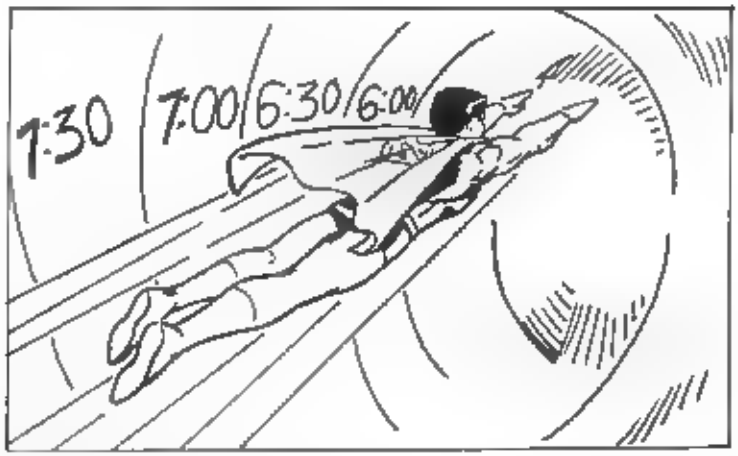
"Well then, let's go!" I said eagerly.

DOWNTOWN ALEXANDRIA 48 B.C.

Bundled securely in Superman's cape I was unable to hear, see or smell the passage of eons as we hurtled back through time. It was a lot like a sensory deprivation tank, only different. Suddenly Superman unwrapped the cape from around my head. The sun glinted on the blue Mediterranean below us. A great city came into view on the coast, ancient Alexandria, center of learning of the Hellenistic World.

Although we stood in the face of such an awe-inspiring sight, an irrelevant thought crossed my mind as Superman landed in the great agora in the city center, a thought which I nevertheless felt compelled to voice.

"Tell me, Kal, is your hair invulnerable



too? I've noticed that despite the velocities we attain on our flights, it never looks mussed.'

"Why yes, Will, of course it's invulnerable," he replied. "But you must understand that even invulnerable hair will not stay in place against the buffeting it withstands at interstellar speeds. That's why I use a little dab of Brylcream every morning. It even keeps my forelock in place.'

We proceeded through the city. I felt a surge of anticipation at the thought of the best literary masterworks that I, Will Jones, would find laid before me.

"I hope we've landed at the right time," I said. "I would hate to have come here after the library had already burned.'

Superman stepped up to a kindly merchant dressed in a toga with a laurel wreath set in his curly blond locks.

"Excuse me, Citizen," he said, "can you tell two travellers what year this is?'

"Why, it's 48 B.C., of course!" he said.

Feeling heartened, we hurried on.

As we rounded a corner, the sight of billowing black smoke stopped us in our tracks. Superman sniffed the air with his super-smell and said, "That's peculiar, Will. That smells like a gasoline fire to me, and yet gasoline had not yet been refined in this period in history."

Without another word he caught me under his arm and we took to the air. We saw wine-colored flames licking at the marble walls, the broad stairway and the classical columns of a great building, above the door of which was inscribed, "Alexandria Public Library". It was too late for even Superman's powers to make a difference.

Simultaneously, Superman and I spotted a bald figure in gray prison garb, hurrying away with a ten-gallon Texaco can clutched in his hand.

"Why, that's my arch-foe, the evil super-scientist Lex Luthor!" exclaimed Superman. "So he's responsible for the unexplained destruction of the Library of Alexandria!"

Superman changed direction, but before he could swoop down on the dome-headed villain, Luthor climbed into a time-bubble that he had hidden behind some olive trees and vanished into the time-stream. Defeated, we watched the building crumble before our eyes.

"Is there nothing we can do?" I asked.

Superman's brow was furrowed in thought. "Yes, Will, there is one thing we can do. We can fly a little further back in time and be here waiting for Luthor when he arrives."

Why don't we go back far enough to give us a little time to read?" I suggested.

"Sure, Will. And since we're going back only a short time, we won't need to take to the air to get there. Borrowing a tip from my friend the Flash, the fastest man alive, I can vibrate at super-speed and break the time-barrier while apparently standing still."

He took hold of me and vibrated, and I watched the flames die down and the building rise up again before my eyes, as if by a trick of cinematography. Suddenly we were standing before the library in all its splendour. We ascended the stairs expectantly and passed through the mighty doors.

COMIC BEST SELLERS

It was hard finding the books we were looking for, since the Dewey Decimal System hadn't been invented yet. Failing even to find an author and title catalogue, we sought out the librarian. An elderly woman in a frumpy toga, her hair drawn back into a bun, sat at the Returned Scrolls counter.

"Excuse me, Ma'am," whispered Superman, "we're looking for the late works of the great Athenian dramatists and philosophers of the Age of Pericles."

"Right this way, please," she said. She led us down shelves of books arranged into the popular Greek genres: Epics, Odes, Gnomic Elegies, Dithyrambs. She patted a shelf and said, "The Drama section is here. You'll find Philosophy around the corner, next to the sports stories."

We turned our attention to the scrolls. Going alphabetically, we came first upon Aeschylus. Superman translated the titles from the Greek as he read. "*Prometheus Bound... Agamemnon...* Oh, here's one that wasn't in the *Great Books*, Will. It's called, *I, the Tribunal*."

"Wha—?" I exclaimed. "Why don't you scan it and see what it's about?'

"I'll do better than that, Will. I'll read the whole thing at superspeed and condense it for you." He flipped through the scroll at a blur and said, "It's about a vengeance-crazed Spartan mercenary and his many encounters with corrupt, beautiful women and vicious hoods."

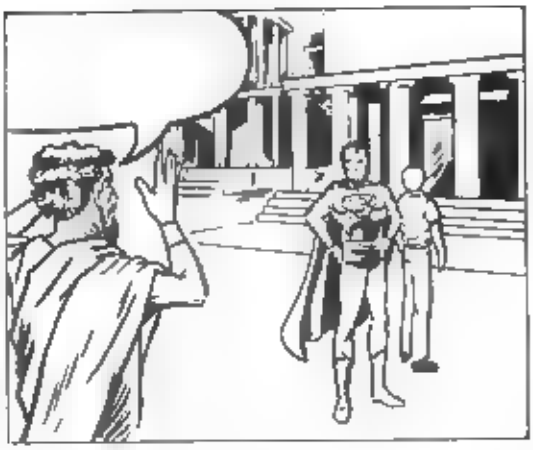
"My God, that's terrible!" I said.

"Why is that, Will?"

"It sounds like a Mickey Spillane book!'

"Well, I enjoyed it, Will. It's true his grammar isn't as good as it was in his earlier works, but it certainly was fast-paced."

"Let's move on," I muttered.



Aristophanes was next. Superman read off all the familiar titles before he came to one called *Barefoot in the Agora*. He read it at super-speed and explained, "It's a light domestic comedy about newlyweds in the big city of Athens."

"Oh Jesus," I said.

"What's wrong, Will? I thought it was rather amusing."

"Let's try again," I said. "I know Euripides won't let us down."

Superman looked and said, "Here's one! It's called *Platonic Story!*"

"Gasp!" I gasped.

Kal speed-read it and reported, "It's a nice love story about two students who meet at the Platonic Academy."

"Let me guess," I said. "One of them dies at the end from an incurable disease."

"How'd you know?" asked Superman.

"Move along," I said. "Move along." The rest were no different: Menander's *Blazing Chariots* and Sophocles' *Island of the Dolls*. Despite these horrors, I summoned up new hope as we rounded Sports Stories and came upon Philosophy. The lost works of the likes of Thales, Parmenides and Democritus lay before us. Superman began to read.

"Here's an interesting one, Will. It's by a fellow named Heraclitus and it's called *I'm Fire, You're Fire*. It seems to be some kind of self-affirming psychology."

An anguished groan escaped my lips. "Try Aristotle, the greatest mind of the Classical world," I said.

"Sure, Will. Here's one called *Steal This Scroll*. Would you like to know what it's about?"

"No!" I said.

"Well, how about Plato, then? You like him."

"No!" I screamed. "Let's get the hell out of here." As we walked toward the entrance I said, "I can't believe it. How could they throw it all away for a quick buck?"

"Will, didn't you once tell me that all the basic plots of Western literature are contained within the works of the Greek dramatists?" asked Kal. "Couldn't they just have burned themselves out?"

I glared at him.

"But even then," he said, "I thought these plays were very entertaining."

"Batman was right," I said. "You've still got a lot to learn about literature, Superman."

"But I don't understand, Will. What exactly is it that distinguishes high art from hack work?"

"It's not something I can put into words, Kal. Ernest Hemingway expressed it best. He said that you just have to have a built-in shit-detector."

"Will!" exclaimed Kal, aghast. "There are children here!"

THE LIBRARY INFERNO

He hurried us outside. As we stood on the steps, his super-nose sniffed the air. "I smell gasoline, Will," he said.

"Luthor must have arrived via his time-bubble," I said.

Before the words were out of my mouth, tongues of flame were darting around us. Superman reacted instantly, using his super-suction to rob the flames of oxygen and snuff them. I saw black dots swirling before my eyes, but then he exhaled and I could breathe again.

Luthor appeared from around the corner of the library. "Superman!" he gasped. "How ironic that we should meet thousands of years in our past for our final showdown!"

"Fiend!" snarled Superman. "How could you try to deprive the world of one of its great treasure-troves of literature?"

"The world will be better off!" hissed Luthor. "If not for me, every classical scholar on earth would be crushed by disillusionment at the spectacle of the world's greatest writers disgracing themselves! Without me, what would become of the world's intelligentsia?" With that, he drew a glowing green rock from under his coat, tossed it at Superman's feet, and ran for his time-bubble.

I reacted instantly as Superman crumpled groaning to his knees beside me. I hurled the glowing kryptonite at Luthor. My years as a Little League pitcher paid off, because I struck him smack on the back of his bald head.

"Good toss, Will!" said Superman as he apprehended Luthor and pushed him into his time-bubble. "This will teach you, Luthor, that no matter how well-educated we may be, none of us have the right to decide which books will or will not be read by succeeding generations! That's the democratic way!"

With one hand, Superman hurled the time-bubble into space, explaining, "I'm sending Luthor on a little trip through time and space. Thanks to my super-aim, he'll materialize back in our own time, orbiting the moon. Later I'll retrieve him and return him to the maximum-security penitentary where he belongs."

As he vanished into the sky, we heard Luthor calling, "We'll meet again, Superman, for our final showdown."

Superman turned to me and said,

"Although he is a twisted, diabolical genius, Luthor does have a love of the finer things in life. This love has made him a hero on the red-sun planet Lexor where, ironically, I am looked upon as a super-villain."

Suddenly the elderly librarian rushed down the stairs, waving a slip of parchment in her hand.

"I saw what you did for us, young man!" she said to Kal. "And as a token of appreciation, I'd like to present you with this honorary library card to our wonderful library, the center of learning in the Hellenistic world."

Superman's face lit up and he said, "I'm truly honored, Ma'am. I'll give this card a place of honor beside my many trophies of past adventures in my twentieth-century Fortress of Solitude."

We waved farewell and Superman flew us to a nearby hilltop for one last look at this glorious city. Superman put his arm around me and we gazed in awe at this monument of ancient civilization. Suddenly, by an ironic twist of fate, a lightning-bolt cleaved the clear blue sky and struck the library. The great building burst into flames.

Superman twitched beside me, but he made no effort to fly down and combat the blaze.

"Superman!" I cried. "Why don't you do something?"

"Because it was meant to be, Will," he said. "As I explained before, not even a Superman can change the course of history."

"How tragic," I said.

Our heartbreaking mission to the past completed, we decided to return to the present. Superman wrapped me in his indestructible cape and we hurtled into the time-stream.

Superman uncovered my face as we arrived over San Francisco, so I could see the view below. Our leisurely flight took us over Telegraph Hill. I would never have thought that it could happen in real life, but as we flew by the Coit Tower, a little girl on the top pointed at us and said, "Look! Up in the sky! It's a bird!"

"No," her mother chided, "It's a plane."

"No, it's Superman!" said a man in a business suit. "But who the heck is that with him?"

Superman and I smiled at each other knowingly.

STRIP SEARCH

MAX ALLAN COLLINS

MICKEY SPILLANE AND THE COMICS

A NOTE TO THE READER: *This month's column will form the basis of a chapter in the forthcoming book* One Lonely Knight: Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, *on which my co-author is Spillane expert James L. Traylor; the publisher is Popular Press of Bowling Green University. Also, some of the material in this piece appears in a different form in the two introductions I wrote for* Mike Hammer: The Comic Strip, *a two-volume set published by Ken Pierce. Volume One,* The Sudden Trap and Other Stories, *was published in 1982; the second volume,* The Dark City and Other Stories, *will appear sometime in late '84 or early '85.*

Mickey Spillane's contribution to the comics has long been obscured in controversy and heresay testimony. In Richard Lupoff and Don Thompson's *All In Color For A Dime*, Spillane is reported as being nothing more than a writer of one-page filler material used to satisfy postal requirements; the reprint of one such page in Les Daniels' *Comix* seems to support this, as does Daniels' description of Spillane as an editor for Timely Comics.

But cartoonist James Steranko, in the first volume of his *History Of Comics*, presents a different picture. Spillane was a scripter of a multitude of titles, Steranko says, and goes on to say: "Spillane was an extremely graphic writer as time would later prove. He wrote for the artist with explicit clarity....Each sentence told precisely enough for the artist to draw just the right panel. This laconic and punchy delivery was the backbone of Spillane's later writing style."

Spillane looks back on his comic book days with much affection—partially because the comic book industry in its Golden Age was where Spillane first made really good money writing.

So his brief return to comics in the form of the Mike Hammer strip (which ran, from 1953 into 1954) was hardly a famous writer slumming, it was more like going home, particularly since he would again work with Golden Age artist Ed Robbins, another Funnies, Inc. veteran. And detective Mike Hammer was finally appearing in the medium he'd originally been intended for.

After the war, Spillane had created a new comic book character—Mike Danger, a rugged private eye—but before the new book could appear, the bottom dropped out of the post-war comics market, prompting Spillane to transform comics character Mike Danger into mystery fiction's Mike Hammer.

The violence of such '50s Hammer novels as *One Lonely Night* remains shocking even in the jaded, numbed '80s; and the sexual content remains potent, albeit hardly pornographic, as it was once thought to be. Still, it is not hard to imagine the furor Spillane caused in those days of Howdy Doody and Ike. Spillane was to mystery writing what Elvis Presley was to popular music—a lot of people reacted with a sort of revulsion—but more were excited by something new, something special, something different. And a lot of records—and a lot of paperbacks—were sold to an eager public. That public was also eager to snap up various spin-offs that

Spillane licensed—like the Mike Hammer comic strip.

What exactly was Spillane's participation in the strip? Initially, the plan was that he would write the Sunday page (a self-contained continuity); his friend, comic book writer Joe Gill, would write the dailies; and Ed Robbins would handle the art chores, with another longtime Spillane crony, George Wilson, handling the lettering (Wilson's tenure was brief, however, and at various times Robbins was assisted on backgrounds and/or lettering by Art Gates, Ray Calkins and Bob Butts.)

Rather than go to a top syndicate like King or the Chicago Tribune/NY News Syndicate, Spillane typically remained loyal to his friends, and to his comic roots, and chose Jerry Iger, from Spillane's Funnies, Inc. days, and his small Phoenix Features Syndicate (begun years before by Iger and Will Eisner, of "Spirit" fame). Another veteran of the Iger shop, Ruth Roche, was editor for the strip.

It is remarkable that at the height of the Mike Hammer "boom"—easily comparable to the James Bond craze of the '60s (in fact it was Spillane who brought Ian Fleming's series to his publisher Signet Books, where initially Bond was blurbed as "the British Mike Hammer")—Mickey Spillane would sit down and write brand-new Mike Hammer stories for a spin-off comic strip. But he did, and two of the three lengthy Sunday continuities, "The Sudden Trap" and "Comes Murder" are solely his work; and he had a hand in the daily continuities as well. What is perhaps most significant is that Spillane has never published a Mike Hammer short story—with the exception of these comic strip continuities.

The unsung hero of the Mike Hammer strip is artist Ed Robbins. The abrupt cancellation of the strip in a censorship flap—a strip which, while not carrying a big list of papers, was clearly a hit, with a number of major markets covered—came as a bitter disappointment to Robbins, who left the field, except for very occasional forays at Gold Key, Dell and National Comics (and one story for the semi-adult *Vampirella* at Warren). Robbins was thereafter involved in real estate and photography, until his death at age 63 in 1982.

In a 1974 article for Richard Kyle's *Wonder World*, I praised the Mike Hammer strip, and went on the line as a Spillane expert giving the opinion, based upon a careful reading of the strip, that the writing was Spillane's own—and was only partially right, as Ed Robbins himself informed me, in a letter a few months later

Robbins was never intended to be a writer on the Hammer strip, but about five or six weeks into the first daily continuity, Joe Gill dropped out, and Robbins, with nothing to guide him as to Gill's intentions for the story, picked the storyline up at this point; after the first Gill/Robbins story, the daily continuity writing became a collaboration between Robbins and Spillane, the latter providing synopses, sometimes over the phone. The Sunday page continuities were given titles by Spillane, which were incorporated into the "From the files of...." logo (the daily stories were untitled at their appearance,

but were given titles in the two Ken Pierce volumes collecting the Hammer strip).

"Comes Murder", the first of the two Sunday page continuities written completely by Spillane, is rife with vivid dialogue and bold characterization right out of the novels; in fact, a variation of one of Mike Hammer's most frequently quoted lines ("I never smack dames...I usually kick 'em") appears here seven years prior to its more-famous appearance in *The Girl Hunters*; moreover, it sets up the punchline of "Comes Murder". Despite the absence of Hammer seeking revenge, many typical Spillane elements are present, including Hammer's secretary Velda being kidnapped, and rescued, followed by a violent final confrontation scene, in which Hammer himself is seriously wounded; the story revolves around Hammer's efforts to help a nice young (rich) couple who are being terrorized by a gambler, who has been printing counterfeit money from plates made by the girl's deceased father. The gambler's spurned girl friend, a "big" blonde (she stands head and shoulders over Hammer), aids Hammer throughout, but turns on him in the end, wanting the counterfeit plates for herself and getting kicked out of the skyscraper window by Hammer for her trouble. It's a shocking moment, as she's been a sympathetically portrayed character, and the reader may well be sorry to see her go.

In the second, more rambling Spillane-written Sunday continuity, "The Sudden Trap", many typical Hammer story elements are present, with two beautiful women vying for Hammer's attention, a whirlwind of brutal action and an elaborately-staged finale. Stopping at a gas station while on a Sunday afternoon spin in the sticks, Hammer thinks he recognizes the supposedly deceased girl friend of a gangster, and starts poking around the little town to see if he's right. This small-town setting is unusual for Spillane, and of his novels, only *The Long Wait* comes to mind as a point of comparison. There is another echo from *The Long Wait*, as the girl is the identical twin sister of the dead gangster's moll, come back for revenge on her sister's boyfriend/murderer ("Sudden Trap" is, typically, a revenge story, but, atypically, the revenger is *not* Hammer, but the beautiful young woman Hammer ends up aiding).

Of interest, too, is the use early in the continuity of the second person, seen so often in the acclaimed but controversial EC comics of this same period (and Robbins' scratchy, moody art brings EC artist George Evans to mind); "That Hammer Guy", the radio show that ran concurrent with the strip, also utilized second-person narration throughout—a very good radio show, incidentally, and some Spillane fans have wondered if he had more to do with that than he's saying (Spillane claims to have completely forgotten about the existence of the radio show at all). A great moment for both Spillane and Robbins, in "Trap", is a provocative cliffhanger panel on September 6, 1953 that shows Hammer and a beautiful woman embracing, with the partial silhouette of a brass bed in the foreground. The kind of comics men like.

The Spillane/Robbins-scripted daily stories are also generally first-rate; both Robbins and Spillane, in their writing, are visually oriented, and Robbins proves himself to be a masterful storyteller, both as a co-writer and as an illustrator. Robbins' continuation of the Joe Gill story "Half-Blonde" is a big improvement over Gill's opening weeks, which capture much of

Spillane/Hammer but are copy-heavy and at times strain to be tough. The opening week of the strip evokes Spillane beautifully: several days go by before the reader gets a look at anything but the back of Mike Hammer's burly, trench-coated back, as he springs into action on a dark street to aid a damsel in distress. An interesting footnote is the use in the story of the Pandora's box legend, as a nickname for the trunk of children's playthings in which some incriminating papers are secretly stored; Pandora's box was a key part of the reworked plot for the highly regarded film adaptation of Spillane's novel *Kiss Me, Deadly*. (Both this comics story and elements of "The Veiled Woman", a science-fiction story that appeared in *Fantastic*, November 1952, appear to have influenced "Kiss Me Deadly" screenwriter A.I. Bezzerides; ironically both stories appear to be among the handful of Spillane-bylined stories Spillane probably did not write.)

The other daily stories maintain a high standard. "The Bandaged Woman" is a solid Hammer tale, with some snappy dialogue ("Heel meets heel, Mr. Hammer!") and, if Robbins did do the actual "dialoguing" as claimed, writing that constitutes about the best Mickey Spillane "ghosting" one could think of ("My shadow was in a hurry going across the courtyard, and I moved to catch up with it before someone else did").

"The Child" is a short, effective story with some of Robbins' most understated, effective storytelling, particularly in a silent fight sequence at a lake cabin, where a

child is held captive; the identity of the kidnapped child—she is apparently the President's granddaughter—is especially interesting, considering Mike Hammer's image as the returning World War II vet who brings his brand of jungle justice out of the foxhole and into the urban postwar world.

"Christmas Story" is perhaps the most unusual Mike Hammer story ever done—a story of a shoplifting Santa's redemption, it is reminiscent of Spillane's O. Henryesque short story, "The Pickpocket". A small irony about this story is that Spillane, as a Jehovah's Witness, does not himself celebrate Christmas, which the Witnesses equate with the pagan Saturnalia (this does not keep Spillane from knowing "The Night Before Christmas" by heart, however—once on a television special he filled in for an ailing John Carradine and shocked the show's producers by going on without cue cards to recite the poem).

In "Another Lonely Night", Hammer feels betrayed by Pat Chambers and their conflict prefigures the one in *The Girl Hunters;* the finale is a dark waterfront

shoot-out that is Robbins at his chiaroscuro best.

The final daily story, "Adam and Cain", has an unusual piece of characterization in a fearful Mike Hammer, shaken by what he thinks is his new-found cowardice; there is an Old Testament reference in the characters Adam and Cain, the former an evil old man, the latter his equally evil son.

This story served as the loose basis for Dave Gerrity's *The Dragon Hunt*, Signet, 1965, a good, slightly tongue-in-cheek private eye yarn that "introduces"—in his only appearance to date—private eye Peter Braid. The novel includes a few appearances by Mike Hammer himself—Spillane is pictured with Gerrity on the back cover; the gifts of Hammer as a character, a supportive cover blurb and the basic comic strip story show Spillane's generosity with his writer friends. That the germ of Gerrity's story came from the Hammer strip takes nothing away from Gerrity or his novel—which if nothing else completes a story that was left oddly unfinished in the strip.

"The Dark City" is the final Sunday continuity, the first (and only) Sunday sequence in which Robbins took a hand in the writing. Hammer again rescues a damsel in distress, on a snowy dark city street, only to be turned on by her when he roughs up the brute chasing her,—who turns out to be her brother, a shell-shocked vet of the Korean war. Some gangsters are after both brother and sister because of a missing million dollars her recently-slain hoodlum boyfriend held out on his syndicate bosses; the story goes through numerous twists, turns and fist-fights, ending up with the girl, Evie, holding a gun on Hammer, who is tied in a chair; her brother, who betrayed her, is unconscious in the snow outside, where Hammer left him. Evie is about to kill the private eye—only she has fallen in love with him. She goes outside to kill her brother—and herself. (The suicide ending is one Spillane used twice—*The Twisted Thing* and *Me, Hood*—which indicates he probably had a hand in at least the plotting of "Dark City".) It's a poignant moment, sensitively handled by Robbins, when in silent panels Evie approaches the bound Hammer with a gun, apparently to kill him—then kisses him instead, before going out into the night to die.

Robbins took credit (or blame) for the cliffhanger panel (January 24, 1954) in which Hammer bursts in on a room where Evie, dress ripped, undergarments exposed, is tied to a bed, in the process of being tortured by a thug who holds a lighted cigarette to her bare foot. Dave Gerrity remembers being shocked by the panel, and telling Robbins shortly after, "Ed, you've proven the pen is mightier than the sword—you've done something nobody else has been able to do: kill Mike Hammer."

Nevertheless, "Dark City" is one of the best Mike Hammer stories in the strip's short, but impressive run, certainly the story most evocative of the novels from which it "spun off".

EDITORIAL

By Hal Schuster

Last issue Collector's Corner raised an interesting issue. Just what are comics really worth. T.J. rather delicately points out that perhaps the bible of the collector isn't. I was sort of expecting a response from the esteemed Robert Overstreet on that one. I was also expecting to hear from some of our readers—both collectors and dealers. Perhaps the letters haven't trickled in yet or perhaps T.J. was just airing conventional wisdom. Is the concensus now that investing in comic books is a foolhardy stunt? The mass circulation publications such as *Sylvia Porter's Personal Finance* and other such worthies don't seem to

To settle this matter once and for all I thought that a simple challenge might be best. The rules are very simple and the question should be settled straightaway. It seems that the real question here is whether, on a large basis not just for one issue of one book, investing in comic books pays off. In other words, if you put your money in a comic book as an investment, say $100, will it deliver a profit, bringing you cash up to more than $100? Or, alternatively, will it simply become a lost cause? And remember, appreciation of the property of a paper nature does not count. In other words, just because you buy a book for $100 and the next year's price guide values it at $200, that doesn't count. Someone actually has to pay you $200 in cold, hard cash for it to count. You also have had to make this sale during the last year, although you can have bought the book during the past fifteen (thus giving some advantage to the pro-investing side of the coin). Finally, you cannot have done this as a dealer or as any type of professional within the field. What we want to see is whether collector/investor purchases result in —good or bad news in the long run. Obviously dealers do not buy at the same price that the ordinary guy has to.

Before we list the rules of the game, there is one thing that should be pointed out. Whether it turns out that you make money by buying comics or not, it is still a good purchase. What you are also buying (and perhaps the only thing you are buying) is the enjoyment you receive by reading a good story and admiring excellent artwork. When you purchase a ticket to a movie, concert or play, you don't expect to resell it at a profit—unless you are a scalper, that is. You do expect to have a good time. And if you limit your purchases to books that deliver good fun you'll never lose out.

Well, here we go:

1) You must have purchased the books since 1970, and from either a regular magazine outlet at cover price or from a comic book dealer at or above regular cover price;

2) You must have purchased and resold to a retail store at least 50 books;

3) You must have resold the books within the last year (since June 1, 1983);

4) You must not be a professional dealer either through a store or at conventions or through mail order sales.

5) Your entry must include your full name and address, complete details of the books sold, information on the buying and selling prices (these can be close estimates or even a bulk price if that is how they were handled) and the name of the party who purchased them. These details will be confidential if you desire and are only used to aid in the accuracy of the study.

BUT, WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

Two things. First you will help us to reach a clear understanding as to what is really happening within the field, an understanding that we will share with other readers. Second, we will put all of the responses into a large box and pull out the first five in a random selection. All five people will receive an absolutely free subscription to *Comics Feature* for one full year. Everyone, of course, is invited to send in their opinions, but only actual entries will be eligible for the free subscriptions.

Get those entries in early. The *Comics Feature Challenge* ends October 1, 1984. All entries must be received by that date.

SPECIAL COMICS FEATURE CONTEST:
WIN A FREE YEAR'S SUBSCRIPTION TO COMICS FEATURE!

Comics Consumer Guide

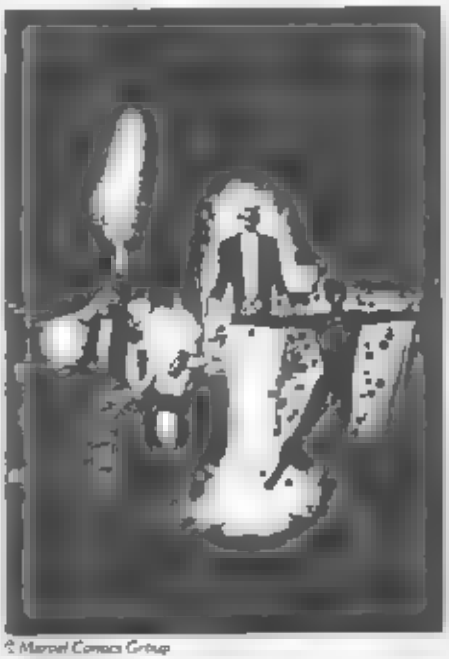
MARVEL

Titles shipping July 3, on sale July 24

☐ **The Thing #17**—The Thing goes in search of his lost love Tarianna on the Secret Wars planet. Mike Carlin/Ron Wilson/Joe Sinnott

☐ **Daredevil #212**—Daredevil is forced to choose between the Kingpin of Crime and Micah Synn. Denny O'Neil/David Mazzucchelli/Danny Bulanadi.

NEW MUTANTS # 21



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☐ **New Mutants #21**—Warlock crashes a slumber party at Professor X's mansion. Chris Claremont/Bill Sienkiewicz.

☐ **The Muppets Take Manhattan #1, 2 and 3**—Adaptation of the new Muppet movie. Kaye/Yeagle.

☐ **Marvel Super Heroes: Secret Wars #7**—Doc Doom fights Galactus, a new Spider-Woman emerges who effects Spidey's costume and the She-Hulk fights alone. Shooter/Zeck/Beatty. Limited series.

☐ **West Coast Avengers #3**—Wonder Man and Tigra go up against Graviton. Stern/Hall/Breeding. Limited Series.

☐ **Machine Man #3**—Machine Man awakes after 40 years and boy is he mad. DeFalco/Trimpe/Windsor-Smith.

☐ **Conan The King #25**—Conan's daughter doesn't want to marry her betrothed and her future father-in-law wants Conan dead. Zelenetz/Silvestri/Isherwood.

☐ **Peter Parker, The Spectacular Spider-Man Annual #4**—Focus on Aunt May, her youth and loves. A past secret materializes to threaten her. Mantlo/Gammill. A Black Cat special by DeNatale/Randall.

Titles shipping July 10, on sale July 31

☐ **Amazing Spider-Man #258**—At last, what makes Spidey's new costume work. Reed Richards and Human Torch guest. DeFalco/Frenz/Rubinstein.

☐ **Captain America #299**—Cap and Red Skull watch as Falcon and Nomad battle the Sisters of Sin. DeMatteis/Neary.

☐ **Thor #349**—The "doom" forger takes on Odin to gain the power to destroy the universe. Simonson.

☐ **Indiana Jones #23**—Indy has to overcome a mad dictator and dive to the bottom of a rocky waterfall. Trimpe.

☐ **Power Pack #4**—Power Pack have to rescue their parents, overcome the Snarks and travel light-years to reach Earth. L. Simonson/Brigman/Wiacek.

☐ **Micronauts #2**—Huntarr makes a startling change. Gillis/Jones/Patterson.

CRYSTAR # 10

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☐ **Crystar #10**—Malachite Men and the Molten Legion are on the warpath as Bekk and Crystar fight for control. Duffy/Villamonte/Simone.

☐ **Sub-Mariner #3**—Namor rescues his love but loses his kingdom. DeMatteis/Budiansky/Bulanadi. Limited Series.

☐ **The Black Panther #1**—Gillis/Cowan/DeLaRosa. Limited series.

☐ **Fantastic Four Annual #18**—The final outcome of the Kree-Skrull War and the wedding of the decade. Inhumans and X-Men guest. Byrne/Bright/Gustovich.

☐ **Savage Sword Of Conan #105**—What is worse than starvation? Conan and his men find out. Kern/Kwapisz/Camp.

☐ **Marvel Superspecial #33 Buckaroo Banzai**—Movie adaptation. Mantlo/Texeira/Gil.

Titles shipping July 17 on sale August 7

☐ **Incredible Hulk #301**—Hulk finds

himself in an alien dimension. Mantlo/Buscema.

☐ **Avengers #249**—The Avengers must prevent the end of the world by ice. Guest-stars the Fantastic Four. Stern/Milgrom/Sinnott.

☐ **Conan The Barbarian #164**—No details available. Fleischer/Buscema/Chan.

☐ **Marvel Tales #169**—Reprinting "Spider-Man #30". Lee/Ditko.

☐ **X-Men #187**—Storm and Forge battle alone against the Dire Wraiths as a blizzard buffets Dallas. Claremont/Romita, Jr./Green.

☐ **Rom #60**—The beginning of the end of the Wraith War. Mantlo/Ditko/Janson.

☐ **Power Man and Iron Fist #111**—Captain Hero wants to join Heroes For Hire. Owsley/LaRocque/Mushynsky.

☐ **G.I. Joe #29**—Villain is Destro. Hama/Springer/Mushynsky.

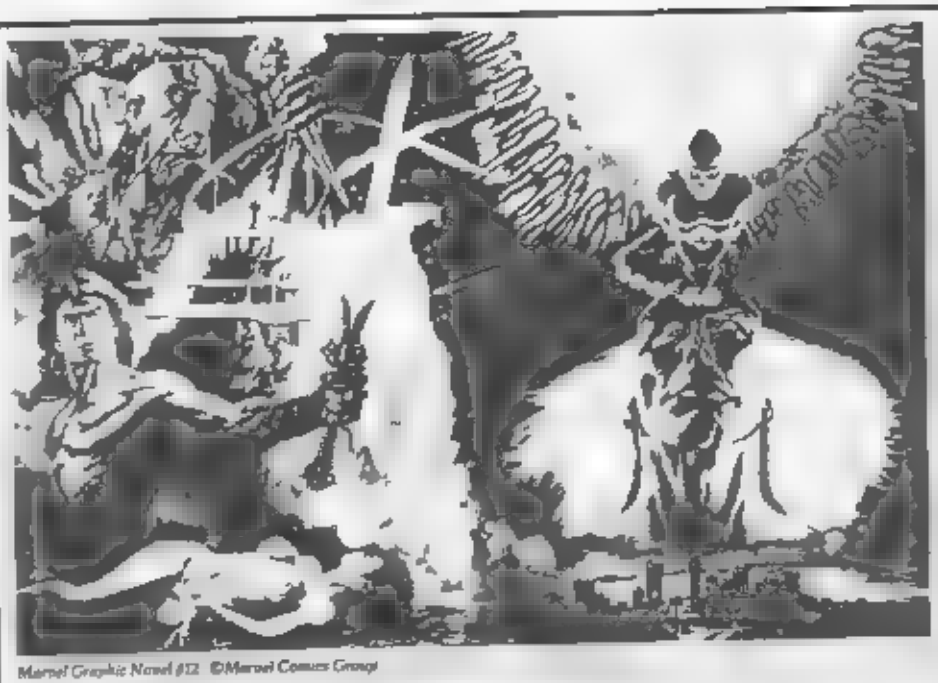
☐ **Temple Of Doom #3**—Part 3 of the movie adaptation. Michelline/Guice/Akin/Garvey.

☐ **The Last Star Fighters #2**—Part 2 of movie adaptation. Mantlo/Blevins/Salmons.

☐ **Avengers Annual #13**—Guests the Beasts and Mr. Fantastic. Villains Arnim Zola, the Bio-Fanatic. Stern/Ditko/Byrne.

☐ **Thor Annual #12**—Thor discovers his half-brother, Vidar, who asks Thor to avenge his wife's death. She was killed by storm giants. Zelenetz/Budiansky.

☐ **Marvel Fanfare #17**—Skywolf by Wolfman/Cockrum/Sinnott. The Hulk by Kraft/Salmons. Hudson paper. Direct Sales only



Marvel Graphic Novel #12 ©Marvel Comics Group

☐ **Marvel Graphic Novel #12**—Void Indigo. Steve Gerber/Val Mayerik. Direct Sales Only

☐ **Marvel Graphic Novel #11**—Dazzler The Movie. Shooter/Springer/Colletta. Direct Sales Only.

Titles shipping July 24, on sale August 14

☐ **Fantastic Four #272**—The truth about Reed Richards. Byrne.

☐ **Marvel Team-Up #147**—The Black Abbott and the Black Apostles go after the Human Torch's body and soul. LaRocque/Esposito.

☐ **Iron Man #186**—The Brothers Grimm go after Rhodey while Tony Stark begins experimenting. Burkett/O'Neil/McDonnell/Mitchell.

☐ **Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man #96**—Must Dagger die to stop Silvermane? Milgrom/Mooney

☐ **The New Defenders #137**—The Defenders must fight one of their own. Gillis/Perlin/DeMulder.

☐ **Star Wars #89**—Now that Luke and Leia have won, what next? Duffy/McLeod/Palmer

☐ **Alpha Flight #16**—The search for Marrina's mate is resolved. Byrne/Wiacek.

DEFENDERS # 137

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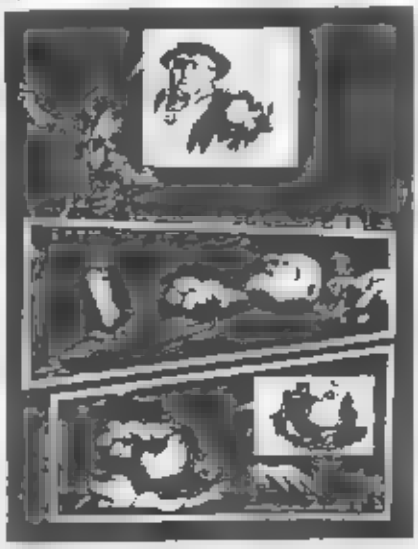
Guide

☐ **Kitty and Wolverine #1**—Kitty Pryde finds her father tangled in a web of intrigue and Wolverine must come to her aid. Claremont/Miligrom. Limited series.

☐ **Hulk Annual #13**—Hulk meets a creature in the alien universe which will be his salvation or his doom. Mantlo/Kupperberg/Tasaoc.

☐ **Epic Illustrated #26**—"The Last Galactus Story" by Byrne/Austin. "Cerebus the Aardvark" by Sim. "The Sacred and Profane" by Steacy/Motter. "Apocrypha" by John/Lakey.

Epic Illustrated #26 cover and interior page ©Marvel Comics Group



☐ **Starriors #1**—The Starriors, a futuristic race of robots searching for mankind and the Destructors who are out to stop them. Simonson/Chen/Akin/Garvey.

☐ **Coyote #9**—Secret behind Shadow Cabinet. Epic. Englehart/Truog/Wiacek. Direct Sales only. Baxter paper

☐ **Dr. Who #2**—Mills & Wagner/Gibbons. Baxter paper, direct sales only

☐ **Six From Sirius #3**—Phaedra's full powers are realized. Epic. Moench/Gulacy Baxter paper. Direct Sales only.

☐ **Marvel Superspecial #34**—Adaptation of "Sheena" Burkett/Morrow.

Titles shipping July 10 on sale August 2

☐ **The New Teen Titans #4**—Titans vs. Trigon. Wolfman/Perez/Perez. Direct Sales Only.

☐ **Justice League Of America #232**—Conclusion of JLA/JSA crossover. Bualek/Kuppergerg/Patton & Giordano.

☐ **Wonder Woman #321**—Final Huntress back-up by Cavalieri/Woch. Wonder Woman by Mishkin/Heck/Magyar/Barreto.

☐ **Blackhawk #273**—Last issue. Evanier/Spiegle.

☐ **DC Comics Presents #75**—Superman and Arion vs ancient Atlantis menace. P. Kupperberg/Mandrake.

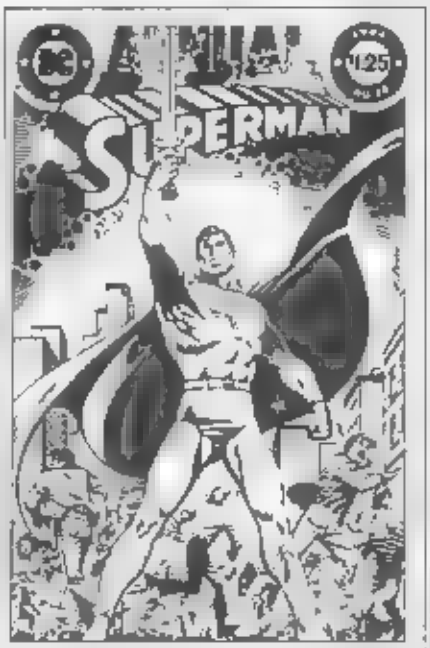
☐ **The Fury of Firestorm #29**—Five new villains. Cavalieri/Kayanan/Rodriguez.

☐ **The Best of DC Digest #54**—Superman battles weird villains. Various writers and artists/Hannigan & Bryant.

©DC Comics

☐ **Vigilante #12**—Secrets from The Vigilante's casebook. Wolfman/Von Eeden. Direct Sales Only. Baxter paper.

☐ **Atari Force #11**—Blackjack and Dart in a battle to the death. Conway/



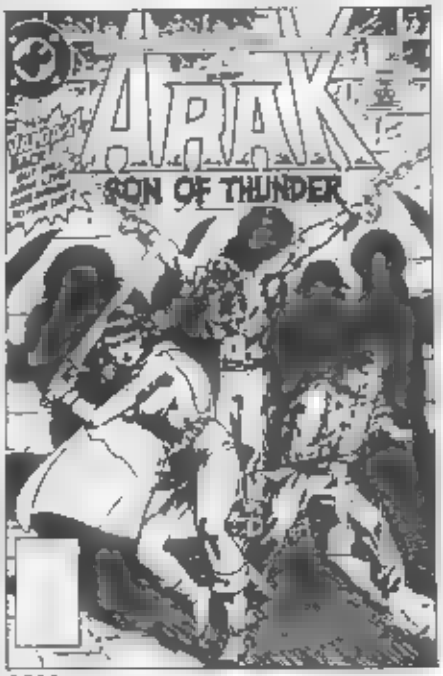
G Lopez/Villagran.

☐ **Superman Annual #10**—The Sword of Superman vs. King Kosmos. Maggin/Swan/Anderson/Barreto.

☐ **Jonni Thunder #1**—Female P.I. becomes living thunderbolt. Conway/R & D Thomas/Giordano.

Titles shipping July 17 on sale August 9

☐ **Arak, Son of Thunder #38**—Valda finds Arak staked out in a dungeon. R & D Thomas/De Zuniga.



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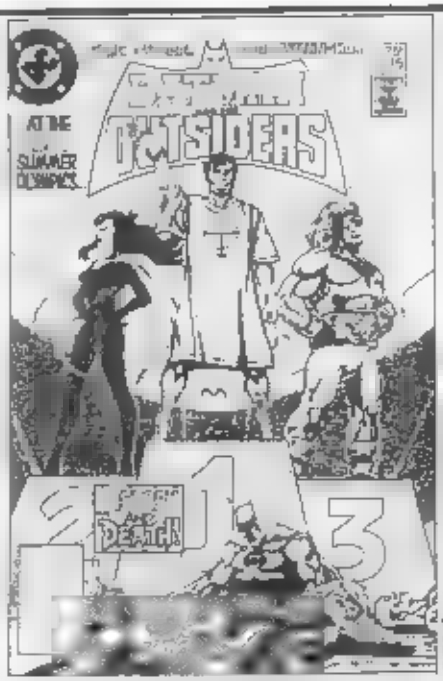
☐ **Batman #377**—The battle to the death with the Slayer of Night. Moench/Newton/Alcala/Hannigan & Janson.

☐ **The Flash #339**—Flash meets the foe created by the Rogues Gallery. Bates/Infantino/McLaughlin.

☐ **G.I. Combat #271**—"The Haunted Tank" by Kanigher and Glanzman. "The Mercenaries" by Kanigher and Vicatan.

☐ **Superman #401**—Superman is trapped in Luthor's lethal warsuit. Bates/Swan/Hunt.



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☐ **Tales Of The Teen Titans #48**—Four new foes in Las Vegas. Wolfman/Rude/Perez.

☐ **The Omega Man #20**—The end of the Psion threat. Moench/T. Smith/Tanghal. Direct Sales only Baxter paper.

☐ **Star Trek #9**—After the movie...? Barr/Sutton/Villagran.

☐ **Amethyst #1**—Amethyst is powerless against Gemworld disasters. Mishkin & Cohn/Estrada.

☐ **Jemm, Son of Saturn #3**—Jemm's origin. Potter/Colan/Janson. Limited series.

☐ **New Gods #6**—Kirby/Royer. Direct Sales only Baxter paper.

Titles shipping July 24 on sale August 16

☐ **The Saga of the Swamp Thing #30**—Part 2. Arcane emerges as a dark messiah. Moore/Bissette/Totleben.

☐ **Batman and the Outsiders #15**—Fight against the New Olympians at 1984 Olympics. Barr/Willingham/Aparo.

☐ **Green Lantern #182**—John Stewart, the new GL, unleased at last. Wein/Gib-[redacted]

☐ **Sgt. Rock #394**—To save Easy's Joes, Rock saves enemy lives. Kanigher/Gonza-[redacted]

☐ **The Legion Of Super-Heroes #4**—A Legionnaire dies. Levitz/Giffen & Lightle/Mahlstedt. Direct Sales Only. Baxter [redacted]

☐ **Warlord #87**—Morgan meets the pirate Hawkins the Red-Hand. Burkett/Jurgens/

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Giordano.

☐ **Thriller #12**—The Seven Seconds finish off the START Corporation. Du Bay/Nino. Direct Sales only Baxter paper.

☐ **Infinity, Inc. #8**—Infinitors vs. the JSA. Brainwave Jr vs. his dad. Thomas/Ordway. Direct Sales only. Baxter paper

☐ **New Talent Showcase #11**

☐ **Blue Devil #6**—Dan Cassidy against reluctant bad guys from space. Cohn & Mishkin/Cullins/Martin.

Titles shipping July 31 on sale August 23

☐ **Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes #317**—The fate of the original Invisible Kid. Levitz/Shoemaker/Kesel.

☐ **Action Comics #581**—The Toyman and Wayne Boring are back. Kupperberg/Schaffenberger.

☐ **Detective Comics #544**—Batman vs. Nocturna with Jason caught in the middle. Moench/Colan/B. Smith/Giordano.

☐ **World's Finest Comics #309**—The villian Quantum. Busiek/Texiera/Hannigan & Janson.

☐ **All-Star Squadron #39**—Amazing Man meets a new "hero"—Real American. Thomas/Hoberg/Collins.

☐ **Arion, Lord of Atlantis #25**—Arion's only path home is through another's soul. P. Kupperberg/Sherman-Tereno/B. Smith

☐ **Sun Devils #5**—Conway/Jurgens/Tanghal. Direct Sales only. Baxter paper.

☐ **Super Powers Mini Series #5**—The dark secret behind the threat. Kirby/Royer

☐ **Fury of Firestorm Annual #2**—Cavalieri/Kayanan.

☐ **The Omega Man Annual #1**—Harpa wins her wings. Moench/T. Smith/Tanghal. Direct Sales only. Baxter paper.

☐ **Camelot 3000 #12**—The finale. No ads. Barr/Bolland/Austin. Direct Sales only. Baxter paper

AARDVARK VANAHEIM INC.

☐ **Normalman #4**

AMERICOMICS

☐ **Black Diamond #5**

☐ **Starforce Six #1**—Black and white.

Archie

☐ **The Original Shield #4**—The Hun returns. Greim/Ayers.

☐ **The Fly #9**—The Fly battles the Red Rogue. Greim/Ayers/Lindsey

☐ **Blue Ribbon Comics #13**—Thunder Bunny and the Mighty Crusaders team up in "A Is for Alien" Greim/Buniak.

☐ **World of Archie #543**

☐ **Betty and Veronica #332**

☐ **Jughead #336**

☐ **Laugh #385**

☐ **Archie at Riverdale High #99**

☐ **Archie's T.V. Laugh-Out #97**

☐ **Katy Keene #13**

☐ **Archie Comic Digest #68**

☐ **Where Are You? Digest #34**

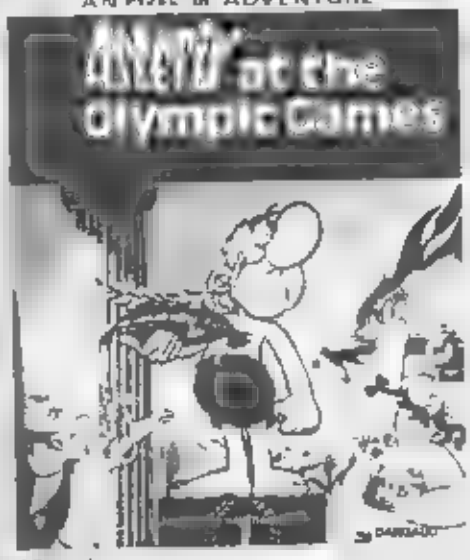
☐ **Little Archie Digest #15**

Comico

☐ **Mage #4**

DARGAUD

AN Asterix ADVENTURE



© Dargaud

☐ **Asterix at the Olympic Games**—Greeks, Romans and Gauls battle it out for the gold.

☐ **Beetle Bailey-Friends**

EAGLE COMICS

☐ **Nemesis The Warlock #3**—Nemesis must fight the dead and only Torquemada can help him. Mills/O'Neill.

☐ **Judge Dredd #13**—The climax to "Day the Law Died" by Wagner/Smith. Plus two tales of Mega-City madness by McMahon.

☐ **The Judge Child Quest #4**—Judge seeks the Child on Ab where a man is dying of the Jigsaw disease and on Xanadu, a barren volcanic rock world which is the haunt of the scum of the galaxy. Wagner/Bolland/McMahon/Smith.

ECLIPSE COMICS

☐ **Sabre #11**—Sabre and Melissa find themselves in the middle of terrorist action but refuse to be run off. McGregor/Ortiz.

☐ **DNAgents #14**—Surge is temporarily in hiding from the authorities and the other DNAgents come face to face with a new DNAgent. Evanier/Meugniot/Blyberg.

☐ **Zot! #5**—Vic has the Key to the Door at the Edge of the Universe. Can Zot and crew stop him from opening it? McCloud.

☐ **Aztec Ace #4**—Ace masquerades as a recently deceased Pharaoh to recover the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Moench/Day

☐ **Eclipse Monthly #10**—Rio has a showdown with Grady Parrish and his

☐ **Star Reach Classics #5**—"Gideon Faust" by Wein/Chaykin. "I'm God" by Sim/Gaabarri, "Summoning" by Levitz/Ditko and "Ersatz" by Marra.

©Eclipse Comics

☐ **Crossfire #4**—The truth behind the half million dollar scam. Evanier/Spiegle.

☐ **Surge—#2**—Surge learns more about the media superstar named Lancer. Plus an Amber back-up. Evanier/Hoberg.

☐ **Scorpio Rose #3**—The last part of this occult trilogy by Englehart/Marshall Rogers & M Hernandez. Plus Dr. Orient by Luria/Rogers.

FIRST COMICS

☐ **Grimjack #4**—A psychopathic assassin is after a Cynosure rock star and Grimjack is hired to protect him. Ostrander/Truman.

☐ **E-Man #20**—E-Man saves Donald Duke and becomes involved with the Golden Gopher. Mike Mauser goes ghost hunting for Nova Kane. Staton/Burchett.

☐ **American Flagg #14**—Flagg uses all his cards willing to use blackmail to achieve his goal. Chaykin/Broderick/Burchett.

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☐ **Starslayer #22**—Torin finds the Golden Moby which may send him and his cohorts back to the beginning of time. The Black Flame falls into the clutches of Hellequin. Ostrander/Truman/Barta/Gill a/Sutton/Lomax.

☐ **Jon Sable Freelance #18**—Jon Sable is waylaid in Idaho on his way to the Olympics. Grell.

☐ **Mars #10**—Morgana and Fawn meet Moot the Caretaker. A back-up feature introduces Dynamo Joe who battles Earth's biggest foe, "the Enemy". Wheatley/Hempel/Ostrander/Rice.

☐ **Spirit #5**

☐ **Harold Hedd #1**—Harold goes after Hitler's secret drug cache as the Third Reich falls.

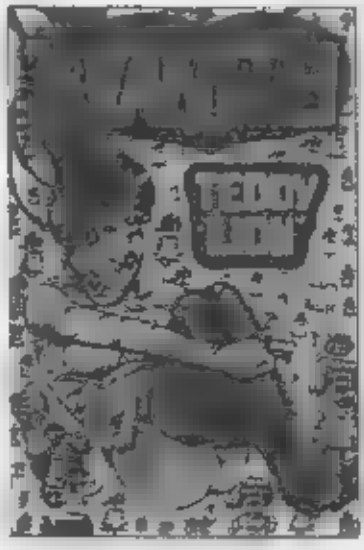
☐ **Steve Canyon #5**

☐ **Alien Worlds #9**—Two rival explorers breach time to capture a dinosaur. Joe Chiodo cover.

☐ **Pressbutton #1**—Brian Bolland cover.

☐ **Sun-Runners #5**—Broderick.

☐ **Strange Days #1**—"Freakwave" Milligan/McCarthy. "Johnny Nemo" by Milligan/Ewins. "Paradax" by Milligan/McCarthy.



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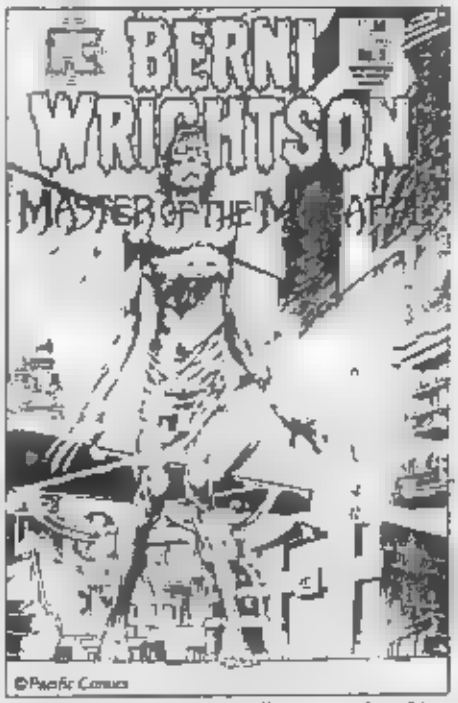
☐ **Vanity #3**—Vanity's origin. Plus Avalone and the emergence of Krodon. Campiti/Rose/Bryant.

☐ **Elric #7**—Adaptation of "Sailor on the Seas of Fate." Gilbert/Freeman



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☐ **Berni Wrightson #6**—"Ain't She Sweet", "Uncle Bill's Barrel", "Mother Toad" and "Limpatrel".

☐ **Jerry Iger's Famous Features #3**—"Flamingo", Kangaroo Man" and "Kid Patrol"

☐ **Zero Patrol #1**—Five strangers have ten days to save the earth. Neal Adams cover.

☐ **Vanguard Illustrated #9**—"Mr. Monster" ends and "The Sentinel" begins. S. Plunkett cover.

☐ **Vortex #12**

LETTERS

Mail Letters To
New Media Publishing, Inc.
1518 E. Fowler Ave.
Tampa, FL 33612

SPORTS COMICS FAN

Dear folks,

I just finished reading **Comics Feature #29**, and I am writing to say that I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Max Allan Collins Strip Search was very well done (where does he find the time for this kind of research and writing with all his duties with **Dick Tracy, Ms. Tree** and his novels?), but there was one tiny error: On page 23, paragraph two, Collins refers to **Ozark Ike** as the only baseball player with his own regular strip. Well, not many people are aware of this, but in the mid-1920s, famed baseball columnist and world-renown writer Ring Lardner's most popular character, Jack Keefe, starred in his own successful strip. Initially, it was written by Lardner himself, but he later took on the role of co-editor. The strip faded in the late twenties for unclear reasons, perhaps because of Lardner's growing discontent with the character, and was promptly forgotten by the general public by the time of Lardner's death in 1933. A collection of dailies and Sundays are available under the title "You Know Me Al" (also the title of the first Jack Keefe novel, published in 1918), and is in softcover form.

All of the other features were impressive, especially your coverage of the Secret War. Your article in Feature News on Rupert Murdoch's attempt to take-over Warner Communications got me very, very angry. Recently, Murdoch bought one of our local papers, the Chicago Sun-Times, and has turned it into a yellow scandal sheet. As this was my favorite of the two Chicago newspapers, I mourn for the loss of a fine institution. I only hope he doesn't get his hooks on DC and Company.

Thank you for a fine publication.

Gene Popa

Stop worrying. Rupert Murdoch lost his bid to take over Warner Communications so DC is safe for now

CF'S OWN CRITIC

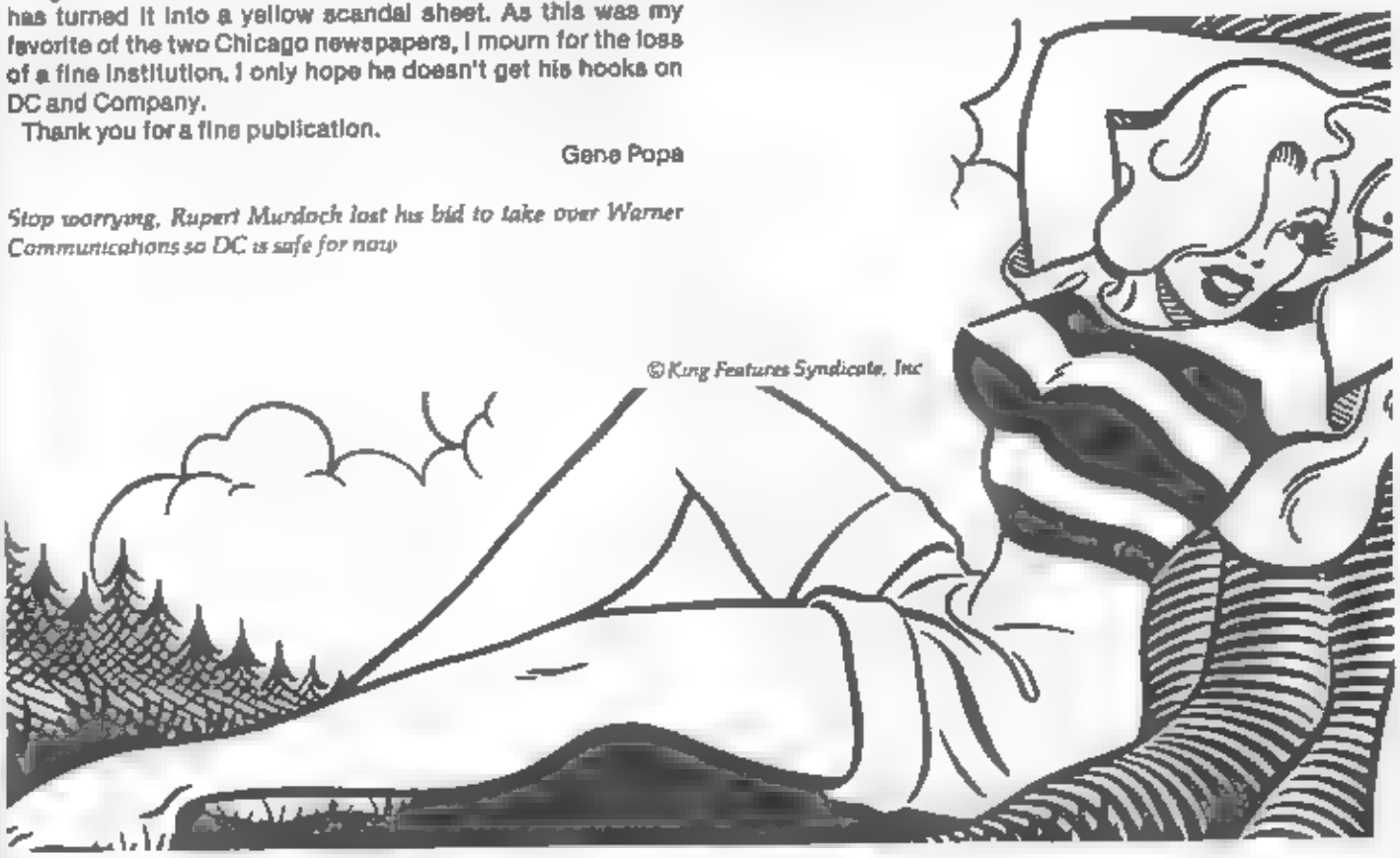
Dear Mr. Schuster:

Hello, it's me once again. I just purchased the latest issue of **Comics Feature** (#29) at a local store and I thought you would like to hear my comments on that issue, as I have sent you personal reviews of your other mass-market releases.

First of all, the cover. Perfect... except you spotlight Marvel for the third time in a row! Don't you think DC (not to mention all of the other publishers) is going to get a bit peeved eventually? Other than that minor point I have no problems with that cover. You even eliminated those distracting little boxes this time around. A very good job.

Your Editorial this time was certainly "different" (for a lack of a better word). However, was it interesting? I think it was, though again there was this big blank space in one corner that could have featured a photo of yourself.

The Feature News article was good and well illustrated on top of that. You can tell, though, that you are operating on quite a time lag when it comes to both this feature and your Comics Consumer Guide. For example, you had "Six From Sirius #4" listed as a comic to go on sale March 27. Well, as of this writing we haven't even seen issue #1 of that mag yet, let alone #4. The same holds true for "Kitty and Wolverine" #2, etc. It's too bad this publishing time lag is unavoidable (it is unavoidable... isn't it?). I did enjoy your previews of upcoming comic book covers.



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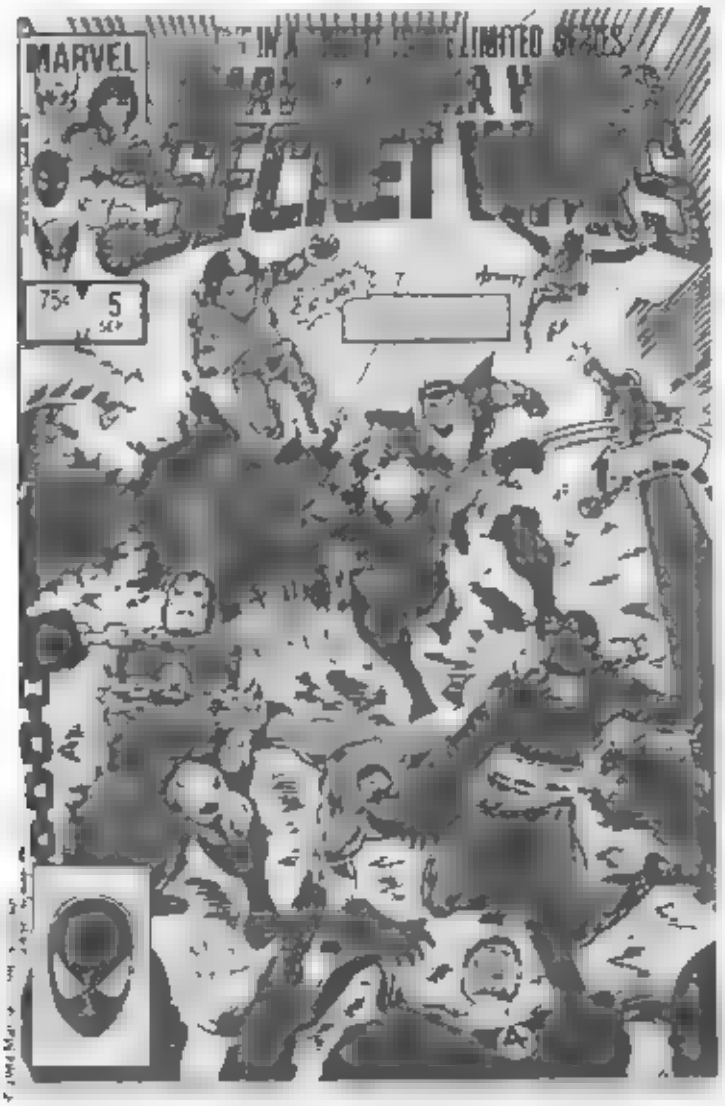
Then there's Sam Kujava's "Notes" column. I detested his first attempt two issues ago, and the one after that wasn't much better, but this one... ah, this one was more like it. He really did a fine writing job here, striking quite a chord with "Tales Of Suspense And Delight". I hope we can expect to see more of the same. Enough of this putting down people in the industry (let's leave that to **The Comics Buyer's Guide**... I noticed in #540 that you, Mr. Schuster, have been pulled into the fray through a reader's letter). Even Mr. Kujava's illustrations to accompany his story were OK.

The main feature of this issue, your article/interview regarding Marvel's maxi-series **Secret Wars** was at times both fascinating and unintentionally laughable (the latter was not your fault, as I shall explain). We finally discovered the "origin" of this new title plus other background details which were all very interesting and involving. There hasn't been anything as controversial as **The Secret Wars** for years (unless you include what John Byrne did, or did not do, in his



Alpha Flight #6). At this point I'm still not sure how I feel about this comic. In a way, I resent the fact that, as you note yourself in your Publisher's Picks, "they (Marvel) have coldly and calculatedly planned a series which every reader of any Marvel comic book will be forced to buy thereby loading their corporate coffers." I also resent some of the changes which seem to have been created just for the sake of change. In fact, some of these changes have already been erased, as in Iron Man's altered armor, etc. I do like the idea of a gamble which is behind this series, because for all intents and purposes it is a gamble, and a pretty big one. I am puzzled and also mildly amused by Jim Shooter's choice for the art team on this mag. In years from now, **Secret Wars** will be remembered (or, perhaps, condemned) for the story. The art will be forgotten. Here we are up to only issue #3 in the series and the art is already being ignored. It's not that I don't like Mike Zeck, as I do, but let's face it... an epic series deserves an epic artist, and Zeck is no John Byrne or Frank Miller. I'm convinced Mr. Shooter did approach one or more "fan favorites" or top names in the industry but they all turned him down. I believe he decided to settle on Zeck but would never admit to this in public, let alone in a published interview like yours. I may be way off base on this one, but that's the way I feel, which is why I laughed out loud at some of Shooter's printed comments. It seems **Secret Wars** may have been a good idea on paper, but the execution leaves a bit to be desired.

Your many other articles (Strip Search, Looking Back On The Golden Age, Animated Antics, Gud Boox, Collector's Corner) were all fun to read for the most part. I especially enjoyed James Van Hise's "Heroes" column, as I am a devoted X-Men fan. Grass Roots, on the other hand, I just could not read all the way through for some reason. This type of article has a certain built-in appeal for specific fans, I suppose, but not me, especially since I've never been anywhere near Ohio. Oh well

Frankly, "Last Chance" is a waste of space. I'd rather see another article or more reviews. Heck, I'll write them for you myself if you want! "Publisher's Picks" was superb, as always. We seem to have a lot in common when it comes to our personal reading tastes. But when are you going to review **Cerebus**? In conclusion #29 was the best issue to date.

Conrad P. Ferber

So what did you think of #30 with it's Supergirl (D.C.) cover and a guest appearance by Spider-Man to fill up the little space on the editorial page? The CF art staff has insisted that Hal Schuster remain a shadowy figure not seen in print (We do ship this stuff through the mail, ya know). The Comics Consumer Guide and Last Chance are bowing out of Feature, partially for reasons you listed and partially as an editorial decision. And if you think Secret Wars *is something, take a look at the news section and DC's plans for* DC Universe: Crisis on Infinite Earths. *As to Hal Schuster reviewing* Cerebrus, *if there is an issue that strikes his fancy that month, he'll tell you about it, if not... well it is called "Publisher's Picks"*

Continued from page 4

"There's no better way to kick off our 50th anniversary than to present this series which will alter our collective universe for the better. I have been listening to the results of the plotting sessions and I am terribly excited about the changes people are proposing," he commented.

Wein and Wolfman promise that in addition to an exciting story, the maxi-series will present a comprehensive timeline for the DC continuity starting with the dawn of time and extending into the far-future. Also, there will be a clear delineation of the powers and origins of the major DC heroes and villains, including some origins never-before-told.

Aiding Wolfman and Wein is Associate Editor Robert Greenberger, who is working from research originally done by Peter Sanderson. It was Sanderson who sat down with every comic DC has published and prepared volumes of notes in anticipation of both this series and the upcoming *Who's Who: The Definitive Directory Of The DC Universe.*

Who's Who: The Definitive Directory of the DC Universe, originally announced for publication in 1984 will now premiere simultaneously with *DC Crisis.* The 24-issue series will present facts and details on all the major characters DC has published in its 50 year history. Written by Mary and Len, the project will feature artwork commissioned exclusively for the series.

Following is an incomplete list of Monitor appearances with more to be announced at a later date:

Action Comics #580
Batman And The Outsiders #14, 15
Blue Devil #5
The Flash #338, 339
Fury Of Firestorm #28
G.I. Combat #273, 275 (Haunted Tank stories.
Green Lantern #173, 175, 176, 178
Tales Of The Legion Of Super-Heroes #317
Tales Of The Teen Titans #21
Teen Titans Annual #2
Wonder Woman #323
World's Finest Comics #311

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"Hal Jordan is going to quit being a Green Lantern for the foreseeable future... possibly forever, " Len Wein announced on April 20, 1984. The writer/editor has been planning changes in the book since taking over with issue #172.

Jordan will be put in a position where

he must honor his commitment to the Guardians of the Universe to the detriment of his friends on Earth in a two-part story in issues #178-179. He actually quits the Green Lantern Corps in issue #181.

"When Jordan quits, all he wants to do is live his life as a test pilot at Ferris Aircraft and spend more time with Carol Ferris," Wein stated. However, Ferris Aircraft was practically destroyed by the Demolition Team and Jordan must live with the fact that he had to abandon those he cares for in order to save another planet.

"Before Jordan goes to Oa to resign from the Corps, he recommends his old friend John Stewart as the architect to help redesign and rebuild Ferris, and his suggestion is readily accepted. When he finally faces the Guardians and gives up his power ring, Hal really doesn't care to whom they give it in his place. There are thousands of inhabited planets in his space-sector and he figures one Green Lantern is as good as another. He just wants to get away from the life of a super-hero and forget his past. That, unfortunately, is his mistake.

"Hal returns to Earth, resumes his life as a test pilot, and almost immediately finds himself face-to-face with another super-villain. Hal is helpless. John Stewart, on the other hand is not. You see, it was Stewart the Guardians chose to be Hal's replacement. John Stewart is the new Green Lantern, and Hal will have to live with this constant reminder of the power he once had but may never wield again. This will not make him a happy man."

Wein characterizes Stewart, first introduced in *Green lantern #87* (and just reprinted in the deluxe format *Green Lantern/Green Arrow #5*), as "more of a free man. His moral obligation is just as high as Jordan's, but his respect for higher authority is practically nil. Stewart has also been out of action for a while and you can bet he's going to be rusty when he picks up the ring. He'll make some mistakes, both personal and professional." The tenor of the series will be altered by these changes, Wein noted, forcing readers to adjust their expectations. "There is no longer a status quo and what was expected before can't be expected now. Making this change opens whole new vistas and gives the series a vitality that excites Dave Gibbons and me tremendously."

Gibbons, the England-based artist for the series, has worked on designs for some major new characters to play a large role in upcoming issues. The first one is the Predator, an enigmatic character who ends up defending Ferris against the Demolition Team after Jordan leaves Earth. He has also designed several new super-powered people who will be introduced in coming months. Wein commented, "This book will be up to its ears in

Commander Steel Vixen Vibe Gypsy

super-characters. Some will be villains turned heroes and heroes will become villains. We're also tinkering with the supporting cast, introducing new people, killing others and whatever else grows out of the stories."

At least one of the characters is intended for a potential spin-off and that's a new super-hero called The Image who will be introduced before year's end.

In addition to the main storyline, each issue will contain a "Tales Of The Green Lantern Corps" featurette. Wein is contacting a wide range of artists and writers to contribute stories including England's Kevin O'Neill, who will make his American comics debut in a two-part tale, written by Joey Cavalieri.

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA CHANGES LINE-UP, TOO

Beginning with the *Justice League Of America Annual #2*, the entire line-up of the group will be changed, editor Alan Gold announced. "We've been promising changes for a while now and Gerry Conway and Chuck Patton have come up with a brand new direction for the series", Gold said.

"In *Justice League Of America Annual #2*, Aquaman will disband the team, claiming too many of the members can't be depended upon and Earth needs a team it can rely on. As the television cameras move closer, Aquaman challenges the assembled JLA to make a full-time commitment to the team. Those willing to commit are Aquaman, The Elongated Man, Zatanna and the newly exiled to Earth J'Onn J'Onzz.

"The team ends up relocating their headquarters in Detroit—a headquarters provided by Hank Heywood III, the grandson of the original Commander Steel. Heywood wants to join the team, as the new Steel, and demonstrates his qualifications in addition to donating the underground headquarters. Conway, who created Steel for DC in 1976, will use the older Commander Steel, who, he says "is philosophically just to the right of George Wallace."

Just as the new League gathers, they are visited by Vixen who, as Marilyn McCabe, has grown bored with being a fashion model. Her powers, Conway says, "are the ability to duplicate an animal's powers. They're a natural ability, heightened by the African Tantu idol she wears." Vixen was created by Conway in 1978 and has appeared only twice before, most recently in DC *Comics Presents #68*.

Once in Detroit, the Leaguers meet up with two more people who will join the team. The first is a Hispanic youth named Paco who has incredible vibratory powers. He exhibits the abilities while breakdancing and calls himself Vibe. Being a former gang leader, Paco decides he likes the League and chooses to "hang out" with them.

Finally, the League meets up with Gypsy, a 14 year old street urchin who happens to be a master thief. Gypsy, Conway explains, can fade into the shadows and, like a chameleon, blend in with any scenery. She's caught trying to rob the new Headquarters and every time she's asked, Gypsy provides a different answer to her background, making her a bit of a mystery not even Elongated Man can solve.

Conway explains the need for a new membership in these terms. "Every 20 years there's a new generation in comics. From the '40s through the '60s we had one generation, then a new generation sprang forth from the '60s to the '80s. We're four years into the '80s and it's time for the next generation. That may be one reason why some people feel the JLA is stagnant. A group needs cohesion but too many of the members had continuity of their own that conflicts with the team title. The group also became too strong and the threats too cosmic.

"We're tightening the focus now, coming up with a human-scale Justice League. We can now have stories the go from street fights to earth-shaking battles like the Earth-Mars war. The stories will also be more people oriented as we concentrate on the interrelationships in the team... and there will be a lot happening there."

Conway adds praise for the contributions of penciller Patton, who designed the four new members. "Chuck is a really bright guy with a good grasp about super-hero characters in the '80s. I'm ecstatic over his character designs, especially the redesign of Vixen."

Together, Gold comments, Conway and Patton are reshaping the *Justice League Of America* to make it ready for the demands of today's comic reading audience. "I have every faith that the new direction and members will make this book come truly alive," Gold says.

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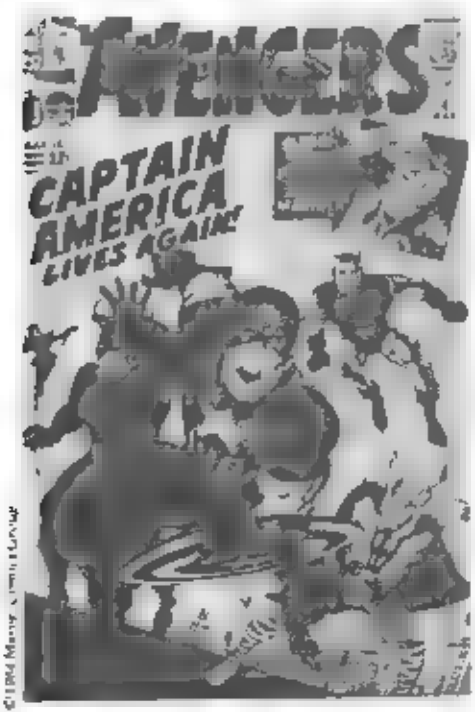

#4 reintroduced Captain America!

Captain America had seemingly reappeared, drawn by Jack Kirby, in *Strange Tales #114*, but this turned out to be an old foe of the Human Torch's who had disguised himself as Cap. Since the foe was actually the Acrobat, his imitation was nearly flawless. When Captain America was given his own strip in *Tales Of Suspense*, The Acrobat turned up there as well, as sort of a hero/villain.

Headlined "The Return of Captain America" on the cover, the story opened with Namor licking his wounds after the battle in *Avengers #3* and dispersing a group of Eskimos who are worshiping a strange icy slab which contains a dark shape trapped within. Namor hurls it into the sea where the warm waters of the Gulf Stream cause the ice to slowly melt. On their way back from the remote island where the battle with Namor and the Hulk transpired, the Avengers spot the floating body from the observation port of their special undersea craft. Bringing the body aboard, they find a frozen figure wearing a familiar red, white and blue costume beneath the tattered remains of an army uniform. Captain America revives from suspended animation in dramatic fashion and after some quick reflex tests to show that he's not an imposter (at least they didn't fight it out, which showed rare restraint on Marvel's part), Cap explained how he had dropped from a booby-trapped plane and was hurled into the sea by the same explosion which killed his World War II partner, Bucky Barnes. Somehow, when he sunk into the sea, his body froze, although how that occured, exactly is brushed over since Cap certainly couldn't remember what happened when he was unconscious. In the mighty Marvel Age of reexploring history and tying up loose ends, there may be a story in this.

For several years fans debated over how the Fifties Captain America fit into all this. Was all that stuff Earth Two like D.C.'s Justice Society stories? Eventually it was explained in the Seventies that the Fifties Cap was a second Captain America created with an imitation of the formula which brought the first one into being, an imperfect formula which eventually drove the second Captain America crazy. This explanation went down hard with fans who'd read Cap's adventures in the Fifties and felt cheated being told that it was never really Cap at all, but just a crazed commie hunter. But that's how the rewritten history went.

There are interesting scenes in *Avengers #4* of Cap returning to civilization and finding himself knee-deep in a mystery involving an eons old alien and a denouement which takes place on another remote island and in the middle of a pitched battle with the legions of the Sub-Mariner.

The rest of the Kirby issues read equally interesting, such as "Invasion of the Lava Men" in #5 (spun off from ideas introduced in *Thor #97*), "Masters of Evil" in #6, wherein various foes of the Avengers teamed up, including the interesting but seldom used Radioactive Man, and "Kang, the Conqueror" in #8 which introduced the time lord and expanded the paradox which linked him to Rama-Tut (*Fantastic Four #19*) and Dr. Doom. The paradox was later expanded still further into an unnecessarily contrived and complicated scheme of characters.

Avengers #9 introduced and killed off Wonder Man, a character who would be revived years later to become part of the Avengers.

Issue #16 began what would become a tradition, that of a rapid turnover of the roster so that members would come and go as though through a revolving door. Thor and Iron Man left the group and they were replaced by Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. It wasn't quite the same. This was ostensibly done because Thor was so powerful that he could generally take on the menaces single-handed and didn't really need the help of the others. At times one could detect the writer holding back on

displaying just how powerful Thor really was. A similar argument could be made for Iron Man in the absence of Thor, certainly when the remaining members were Captain America, Giant-Man, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch. The powered down lineup also signaled powered down stories. Giant-Man changed his name to Goliath but a costume change doesn't change the character. Marvel was clearly uncertain what to do with him other than drop his own strip from *Tales to Astonish* where he had begun as one of Marvel's first super-heroes.

Soon Hawkeye and the Black Panther were added to the line-up, which made for more interest and diversity, but it was the introduction of the Vision in *Avengers #57* that really gave the stories a boost. The android avenger, created by Hank Pym and then used by the computer Ultron 5 as an unknowing agent, was an interesting device, although the frequent return of the supposedly destroyed computer (Ultron 6, etc., etc.) did become tiresome.

One of the more interesting stories in this period was "Some Say The World Will End In Fire, Some Say In Ice!" in *Avengers #61*. Written by Roy Thomas and drawn by John Buscema, with crisp inks by George Klein, it was the conclusion of a story begun in *Dr Strange #178* and guest-starred not only the Master of the Mystic Arts, but the Black Knight as well. This late Sixties issue was from the period when John Buscema was still bringing a lot of energy and enchantment to his work, such as he did in those classic issues of the *Silver Surfer*. The inking by Klein is careful and defined, not like the too often rushed looking inking which fills many comics today.

During this period Goliath went through another change when Hank Pym became schizophrenic and adopted the identity of Yellowjacket in which he masqueraded as a mystery man to the other Avengers. Shortly after this he gave up the Goliath identity in the belief that the years of growing and shrinking had brought on his brief mental imbalance. At this same time Hawkeye became disenchanted with his own contribution as an Avenger and in #63 he adopted the Goliath identity for a time, but after a few years he returned to the more popular Hawkeye identity.

Avengers #66 and *67* featured two issues by a newcomer to Marvel at the time, namely one Barry Smith. This was during Smith's Kirby imitation period and the inking by Syd Shores on #66 complimented Smith's pencils best and ironed out any awkwardness, whereas the George Klein inking on #67 left some awkward attempts at Kirby-style exaggeration intact (such as panel one on page ten in which Yellowjacket's legs are unsuccessfully foreshortened). As far as Smith's Kirby imitations went, #66 looked smooth and natural whereas #67 was very self-conscious and forced by comparison.

Sometime before, Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch had left the Avengers when Wanda lost her hex power. They reappeared in #75 when during her attempts to regain it magically, she encounters Arkon and is kidnapped to his other

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dimensional world. The appearance of Arkon, a Conan type character in a science fiction setting, predated the appearance of Marvel's Conan by less than a handful of months. The character achieved more personality in the conclusion of #76 and with slick art by John Buscema and Tom Palmer, it remains one of the more memorable in the series long run. Oddly enough, when the Avengers burst through the barrier to reach Arkon's world, Thor and Iron Man are with them even though they had not appeared in the story before that moment. It's revealed that it was Thor's hammer which brought them through the barrier after all other efforts had failed, and the reappearance of these two old Avengers is a welcome one, making the story even more colorful.

Over the years the Avengers has become a rather large organization with provisional members, members on inactive status and the like and it was not at all unusual for inactive members like Thor and Iron Man to suddenly put in an appearance, especially since Tony Stark is Iron Man and the Avengers mansion is leased from him. Thor and Iron Man also guest-starred in the story in issues #80-82 and the problem of using Thor creatively came up again when it was Thor who single handedly ended the menace in the final showdown.

Although the origin of the Black Panther had appeared in the *Fantastic Four*, drawn by the character's creator, Jack Kirby, a slightly expanded version appeared in *Avengers #87* written by Roy Thomas and drawn by Frank Giacoia and Sal Buscema. Marvel had been of two minds during this time about using a black character named The Black Panther in their comics. Although created before the rise of the militant Black Panther party in the late Sixties, they found themselves with an interesting black character whose name was nonetheless coincidentally tied to a militant element. In an attempt to use this interesting black character and avoid controversy, they began referring to him as just "the Panther", which is what he's called in *Avengers #87*. On the cover Marvel backed off even further by never using The Black Panther's name in any form but rather his African name. T'Challa. The cover of #87 even proclaims, "Revealed At Last! The Origin Of T'Challa!" Although the cover makes it clear that he's a black character, new readers must

have wondered what in the world a "T'Challa" was. It would be another couple of years before the Black Panther's original name was completely restored

The Black Panther was created by Jack Kirby with a sleek black costume which covered the character's entire body, except for the eyes. But when he began appearing in the Avengers, his mask was changed so that it was obvious that he was a black character. Unfortunately, this change made the costume look awkward somehow rather than mysterious and cat-like such as Kirby had intended. After several issues the costume reverted back to its original and more effective form.

Perhaps the single best known Avengers saga outside of the return of Captain America in #4 was the Kree/Skrull War series which began in #89 and concluded in #97 This graphic novel (which is what it truly was) involved Captain Marvel and most all of the Avengers of the time (Thor, Iron Man, Captain America, the Vision, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Goliath). It concerned the Kree branding Captain Marvel as a traitor to their race and then the Skrull going after Mar-vell for information he possessed. In the middle of all this, Mar-vell is branded an enemy alien by Congress and is wanted for questioning about a Kree attempt against Earth made at the North Pole. The Avengers harbor Captain Marvel in secret while they attempt to clear his name. The Inhumans, who are actually Kree descendants, come into the middle of all this as well and it's not surprising that the whole saga spanned nine issues. So much happened each issue, with important plot events following swiftly on top of one another, that unlike other multi-part stories done in other books, this one was neither padded nor stretched beyond the requirements of the story. It's no wonder that it's considered the crowning touch to Roy Thomas's several year stint as writer on the book.

As with any Marvel comic, musical artists were played with the Avengers so that the illustrative team changed every few issues. But during the most crucial issues of the Kree/Skrull War saga, Neal Adams stepped in to pencil issues #93-96 (with inks by Tom Palmer), which insured that Roy's star-spanning story would be translated into the most dynamic visual terms possible. (Marvel recently reprinted the last five

issues of this continued story, beginning with the Neal Adams issues, in a two-issue deluxe format on high quality paper.)

All four of the Thomas/Adams issues are excellent, but the one which stands out just slightly ahead of the others is #93, which features the Ant-Man in a "Journey To The Center Of The Android!" in chapter two. This is Ant-Man's only appearance in the Adams issues and he shows up just in time to enter the Vision in order to repair some delicate internal mechanisms which have immobilized the Avenger. But wasn't he just Yellowjacket a couple of issues before? The reasoning presented is that the Avengers had sent out a call for the original team to appear, and Henry Pym was the Ant-Man way back when. Sure it's contrived but it's okay since Ant-Man has always been the most interesting of the character's many versions. Henry Pym would return a few issues later as Yellowjacket once again and the Ant-Man identity would be given over to an entirely different person some years later

The Ant-Man section is interesting not just for nostalgia's sake, but because Neal Adams captures all the romance of the character that Kirby did during his first few stories beginning back in *Tales To Astonish #35*. The interior of the Vis on as seen by Ant-Man is fascinating and unusual and is the high point of the issue. This sequence was clearly the inspiration for a similar one involving the new Ant-Man in *Iron Man #133* when Ant-Man had to find his way through the walls of Tony Stark's armor in order to make a crucial repair after Iron Man has been felled in a brutal fight with the Hulk. It's a nice idea but it pales next to the Adams/Palmer sequence in *Avengers #93* This sequence in *Avengers* is so interesting that few people ever noticed that it was padded so that six new pages could be added in the middle of Ant-Man's passage when it was decided, at the last moment, that *Avengers #93* would be a thirty-four page, 25 cents issue instead of the standard twenty-three page, 15 cents issue. In fact it served as a bridge in that #92 was 15 cents while #94 was the first 20 cent issue (although still the same size as #92's fifteen cent version).

After Roy Thomas left *The Avengers*, a number of other writers followed in short order Steve Englehart did some fine issues, but when he began having deadline problems, Gerry Conway was asked to take over the title. Steve Englehart was highly resentful of this and has even gone on record accusing Conway of outright stealing the book from him for no other reason than that Conway wanted to do *The Avengers* at Marvel having just come off writing the *Justice League of America* at DC. Conway denies those circumstances.

"I didn't actually even want to write the book, but the previous writer was late and even had I wanted to take on the title I would have wanted a couple months to gear up for it. As it was I had to jump right in without any planning as to where the title was heading. I only wrote it for eight issues so it was just an interim thing I left the book just as abruptly as I'd joined it as it was."

The Avengers have never remained stagnant, though, no matter who was doing the book The Vision married the Scarlet Witch (which opened the door on all sorts of unanswered questions regarding human/android marriage) and in *Giant Size Avengers #1* (1974, not to be confused with *The Avengers Annual #1*) it was revealed that the father of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, was the Golden Age character The Whizzer But that was what Roy Thomas wrote. In 1979 in issues #185-187, in a plot by Mark Gruenwald and Steven Grant (based on events put into motion by David Michelinie), it was strongly hinted that Magneto was their father (which was late proven to be fact) and that The Whizzer had been lying. But had he been lying when Roy Thomas spun his fable in 1974? If there's anything that Marvel has historically not liked to leave alone, it's history

Another problem the Avengers encountered was the fluctuating size of the team. This came to a head in #181 (written by David Michelinie and drawn by John Byrne and Gene Day) when in order for The Avengers to regain their Avengers Priority rating with the government, the team was pared down to seven members: Iron Man, The Vision, Captain America, The Scarlet Witch, The Beast, The Wasp and The Falcon. The scene is amusingly handled by showing the pleased and surprised faces of each chosen member except that when The Falcon's name is announced, we're instead shown the startled face of Hawkeye. Other Avengers not chosen who were active at the time and present at the

meeting included Capt. Marvel, Wonder Man, the Guardians of the Galaxy, Thor, Yellowjacket, the Black Widow, Quicksilver, Hercules and Ms. Marvel, just to name a few. There's even a satirical interchange about how the Falcon was chosen by the Government representative in order to have minority representation, which ignores the fact that mutants, gods and androids are an even smaller minority than any racial group. This governmental interference in the roster was not lifted until #191.

Artists in the late Seventies and early Eighties included George Perez and John Byrne, showing that the title has long been considered a prestige book, although in the last couple of years the title has suffered in this regard, perhaps by the weak lineup which has been offered.

The annuals have had some special artists working on them. The most notable issues are #7 by Jim Starlin, which featured all of the major Avengers plus Adam Warlock, #8 by George Perez, #9 by Don Newton and #10 by Michael Golden.

A couple of the more interesting Avengers sagas of the past few years haven't even been real. *What If? #3* featured "What If The Avengers Had Never Been?", co-plotted by Jim Shooter and the story's artist, Gil Kane. Capturing the feel of the Sixties Marvels, Kane's story postulated a different direction from the ending of *Avengers #2* in which the whole group split up this time rather than just having the Hulk quit. Iron Man then decides to take on the hulk and Namor alone... and loses.

What If? #20 postulated a Kree/Skrull war without the key contribution made by Rick Jones in *Avengers #97*, while *What If? #25* had Thor and the Avengers taking on Asgard.

Nowadays the Avengers lineup has fallen to lesser lights such as Starfox, the new Ms. Marvel, and worst of all, the She-Hulk. Issue #239 featured guest appearances by Hawkeye, Wonder Man, the Beast and the Black Panther which succeeded only in showing how weak the regular lineup is with Captain America and the Vision remaining the only interesting regular members.

The Avengers, because of its fluctuating lineup, has more potential for colorful stories than most any other book and this has been proven time and again. The current sad state was further underscored when 1983's Annual #12 needed to add Thor to brighten the lineup and pump up the story. Like any book, it goes through changes and seems to be neglected; but it remains the best book of its type next to the *Fantastic Four*, the *X-Men* and the *J.L.A.*

Certain interesting Avengers tie-ins have appeared over the years, the first being a regular novel written by Otto Binder and published in 1967, called *The Avengers Battle The Earth-Wrecker*. The lineup was Capt. America, Hawkeye, Quicksilver, the Scarlet Witch and Goliath. A year later an original Captain America novel, *The Great Gold Steal* by Ted White, was also published by Bantam books.

In 1979, Pocket Books published a whole series of Marvel superhero novels, including an Avengers novel by Jim Shooter and an Avengers novella which appeared in a collection of stories about the Hulk, the X-Men and Daredevil.

The Avengers remains an interesting book to watch, even if it isn't always worth looking at. Its track record is one of the most impressive in comics and demands attention for that reason alone.

strong, and it was not born and it did not live. It grew and moved about without living.

It crawled out of the darkness and hot damp mold into the cool of a morning. It was huge. It was lumped and crusted with its own hateful substances, and pieces of it dropped off as it went its way, dropped off and lay writhing, and stilled, and sank putrescent into the forest loam.

It had no mercy, no laughter, no beauty. It had strength and great intelligence. And—perhaps it could not be destroyed. It crawled out of its mound in the wood and lay pulsing in the sunlight for a long moment. Patches of it shone wetly in the golden glow, parts of it were nubbled and flaked. And whose dead bones had given it the form of a man?

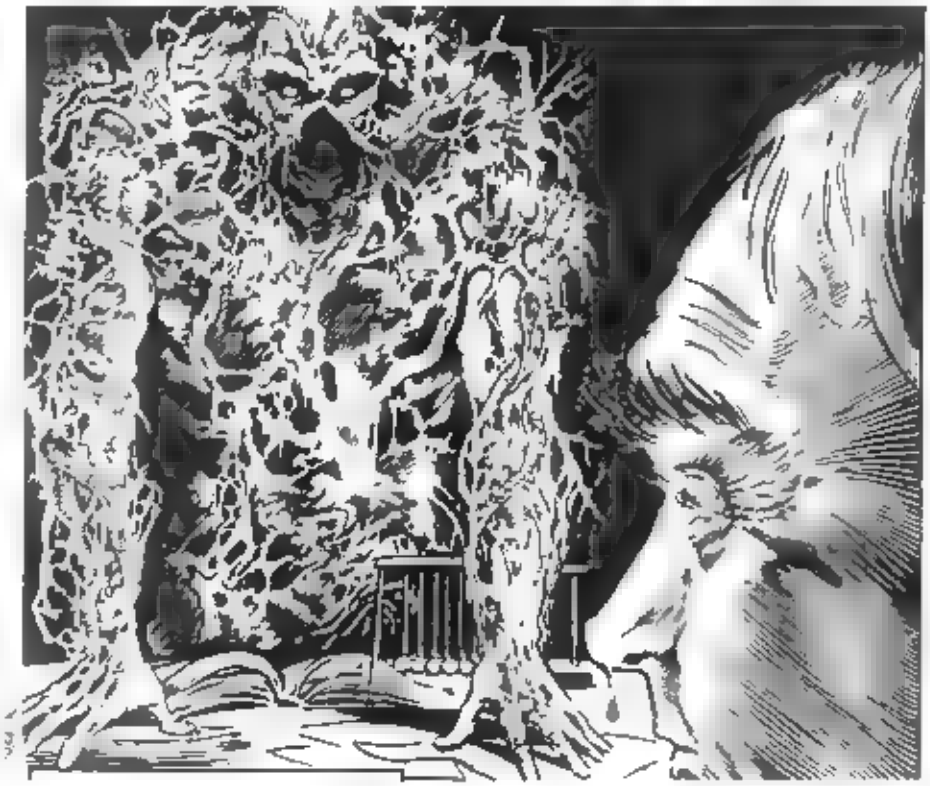
It was old Roger Kirk, sure enough, that skeleton... he had died and sank into the forest floor where the hot molds (built) around his skeleton and emerged—a monster."

—"It" by Theodore Sturgeon
from collection *Not Without Sorcery*
Ballantine Books, 1948

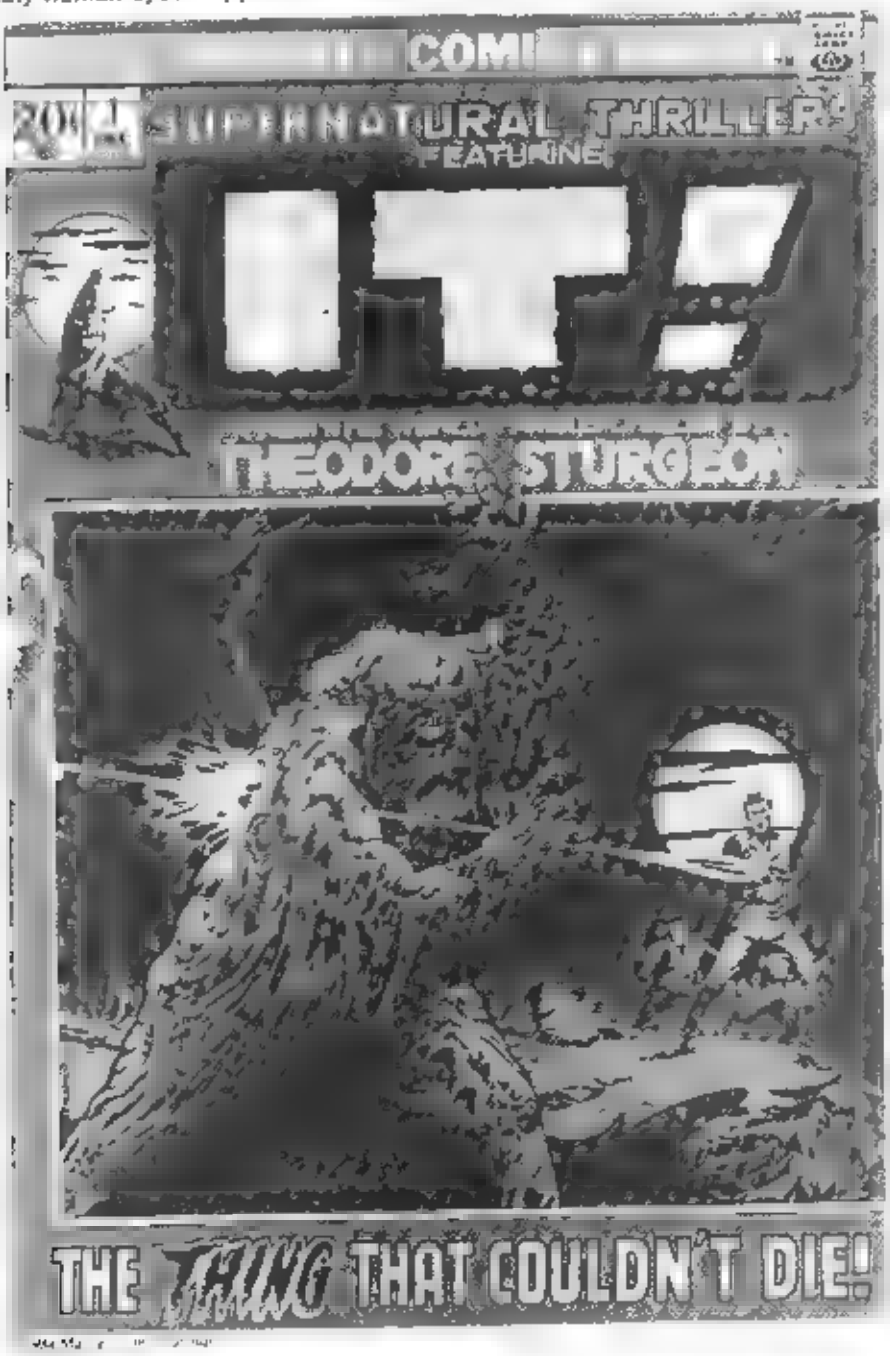
Sturgeon's "It" was spawned by some mysterious chemical imbalance in the forest floor, a mystical genesis. The comic-book offspring opted for more 'scientific' trappings for the man-to-monster transformation. Thus in May of 1971 Ted Sallis injects himself with a top-secret chemical formula "that would change an ordinary soldier into an indestructible warrior" seconds before crashing into the murky Everglades... where "the waters of the swamp interacting with the highly *unstable* solution" gives birth to The Man-Thing! (*Savage Tales #1*). About the same time, coincidentally or otherwise, Wein and Wrightson had already finished *their* version of the same song.

On the comic stands of June-July of 1971, Alex Olsen has his unfortunate 'accident' which begat, a little over a year later, Alec Holland's unfortunate 'accident'—sending his torched body hurtling into the bayou water, his flesh soaked with "countless unclassified chemicals" of his Bio-Restorative Formula. One month later saw the striking swamp monster drawn by Neal Adams on the cover of *The Phantom Stranger #14*, July-August, 1971, from Len Wein's story "The Spectre of the Stalking Swamp". This ties into Len's script for *Swamp Thing #11*, using Professor Zachary Nail and his doomed New Eden. And in September of 1971, Skywald put out a one-shot showcasing their swamp monster The Heap!

What differed in each of these creatures, though, was the 'heart' their respective creators had invested them with... or the lack of same. The murderous, misunderstood Heap, the mindlessly empathic Man-Thing and the tortured, pitiable-but-powerful Swamp



Thing. All had the monstrous visages, the impossibly misshapen bodies composed of swamp matter... but *the eyes* tell the story. The Heap's flare with rage, the insect-like orbs of the Man-Thing are coldly compelling... but the Swamp Thing's brim with sorrow, terribly human eyes trapped in a monster's body, baring awareness, intelligence, soul. Perhaps we are drawn into those eyes, perhaps we can identify all too well with the alienation and sadness they reveal. Perhaps that might account for the meager success the character still enjoys, surviving on the newstand where its kith and kin have died.



It began for Tom Yeates when he landed the art chores on the revival of the book *The Saga Of The Swamp Thing*. Tom being a good friend, and drawing his own brand of crackerjack comic art, I just naturally followed the book's progress with intense interest. Enthusiasm was high, as I recall. It was Tom's first regular gig, doing a monthly book after years of catch-as-catch-can freelancing, and we all knew that Tom was the best "swamp-artist" around. Having traveled through Burroughs' Africa mentally since childhood, he physically explored the South American jungles as an adult. Tom's tropics, veldts and swamplands come alive on the pages he drew. It seemed a natural in lots of ways, though I reckon the potential *beauty* implicit in the character and setting interested him far more than the inevitable horrors ever would or could.

Another source of considerable enthusiasm was the rush of energy behind the revival of the title *and* the upcoming movie based on the Wein/Wrightson original. DC was pushing the book and its creative team, Tom Yeates and writer Marty Pasko, with high expectations. It seemed quite likely that the movie would be terrific (I was excited by the info that Wes Craven was directing the film as his previous horror movie *The Hills Have Eyes* packed considerable punch).

Well, the film sort of slunk out of sight, a kid's monster movie with its merits and moments undermined by a disposable climax and unconvincing low-budget monster makeup. And unfortunately for Tom, Marty saw fit to have Swamp Thing abandon the swamps in issue #1, only to finally return to the lush Louisiana bayou in the last panels of Tom's finale as artist on the book, #13. Tom had done some incredible work in the meantime. Though his collaboration with Marty on the series had yielded issues and sequences of imaginative and unusual impact, there was no denying that the

collaborators and elements seemed too often at odds with each other

Tom's best work carries the energy of high adventure, of the outdoors and being alive, strong splashy visuals cleanly rendered in a "classical tradition" (the Brandywine artists, A Williamson, Frazetta) depicting action, intrigue... *adventure*! All respect due, Marty's style of densely-layered novelistic convolutions and subterfuges, conundrums of deceit, and an almost surreal paranoia of corporate, government and religious powers gone absolutely corrupt and amok (most of Marty's contributions to the 'Swamp Thing mythos' epitomise this: the Sunderland Corporation, the corporate alien being in *SOTST #6* and 7, Kaye/Kripptmann and the Antichrist' conspiracy', etc.) seemed ill-suited for Tom's strengths as an artist and, perhaps, for the character of the Swamp Thing itself Though everyone was giving it their best shot, it became obvious that the collaboration wasn't getting too well. The art seemed stifled, the theatrics stilted, and as the cosmic soap-opera involving all the new characters introduced in the series gained 13 issues worth of momentum —Casey/Karen/Antichrist and Sunderland Corp. versus Kaye/Kripptmann and his entourage of psychic mutants —Swamp Thing became lost in his own title, a spectator rather than star participant. An ungainly, unloved, self-pitying, mossy misfit who always had to ride in the back of the bus, hidden away in crates, kayoed out of the action before it even began. He was, in fact, a dwindling, dying figure in the actual context of Marty's saga, a victim of slow bacteriological poisoning induced by the Sunderland Corporation's conspiracy against Alec Holland/Swamp Thing and his associates. Confusion, despair and angst dominated the proceedings. Appropriate material for a horror comic, certainly, but simply wasn't working as it should have or could have, or might. The potential and the material itself ceased to interest Tom He yearned for something new that was more in keeping with his beliefs and passions. After a respectable and valiant tenure on *The Saga Of The Swamp Thing*, Tom let John Totleben and I know that he was ready to leave the title and that perhaps we should try to take his place if we so desired

SPOTLIGHT

CONAN II

QUEEN TARAMIS' BED CHAMBER #2
(CONAN BATTLES DOMBRATA)

THE ART OF WILLIAM STOUT COMES TO LIFE IN CONAN II.

By Cynthia Broadwater

William Stout, underground cartoonist, assistant to Russ Manning, record jacket and poster artist and now concept artist for *Conan II*. How does a man move from underground comic pages to seeing his art swept into live action on the wide screen?

Stout became involved with underground comics in 1967. He did *Those Lovable Peace Nuts* for the L.A. Underground, "Come Again" for *Flash*, "Realityland" for *Bicentennial Gross-Outs* and various pieces for *Cycle*Toons*, *Car*Toons* and *Little Annie Fanny*.

In 1970 Stout had the opportunity of working with Russ Manning on the *Tarzan* strip. After serving an apprenticeship under Manning's watchful eye, Stout began doing the coloring and some inking for the series. This included learning the European coloring system for *Tarzan In The Land That Time Forgot* and *Tarzan And The Pool Of Time*, both books released for European audiences. Stout still uses the Euopean coloring system on his Underground comics covers.

"If I was independently wealthy, the two things I would do would be comics and oil painting. Since comics don't pay for the lifestyle I'm accustomed to, I have to relegate comics to mostly a spare time activity, which is unfortunate. But that's the way it goes. I like to eat in restaurants." Stout explains. So Stout went on to do record covers, such as the cover he did for Firesign Theatre, theatrical posters including *Wizards* and storyboards for movies. Stout found himself working on *Conan I*, finding storyboarding not much different than cartooning, "The *Conan* storyboards weren't

CONAN II

CROSSING THE DESE

storyboards in the strict form, because Milius (the director) wanted them to look like comic book pages...When I started doing the storyboards I was also designing sets and costumes at the same time...For that reason the storyboards were taking me five days per page."

Satisfied with his work on *Conan I*, Raffaela De Laurentiis (producer of *Conan II*) called Stout in as concept artist for *Conan II*. On

these pages you can see how his sweeping style, steeped in the comic tradition of telling the story in pictures, brings the mythic barbarian Conan to life. Stout feels his artwork has been carried to completion by photographer Cardiff, "In the finished footage I have seen, every frame looks like a painting because of his photography. Cardiff paints with light."

Comic book artist, graphic artist, illustrator (*The Dinosaur Dictionary*), and concept artist on a major motion picture. Where does this talented man go now that *Conan II* has completed production? "I recently wrote a treatment, on spec, for a possible production of *Conan III*." He has also designed monsters for the upcoming *Red Sonja*, another character which benefits from the skill of an artist who is so much a cartoonist.

Animated Antics

By James Van Hise

DOUG WILDEY AND THE CREATION OF JONNY QUEST
Part II

CF: As far as the story dramatics go, isn't there a lot more network interference now than there was twenty years ago?

WILDEY: Oh yes. There's no question about it.

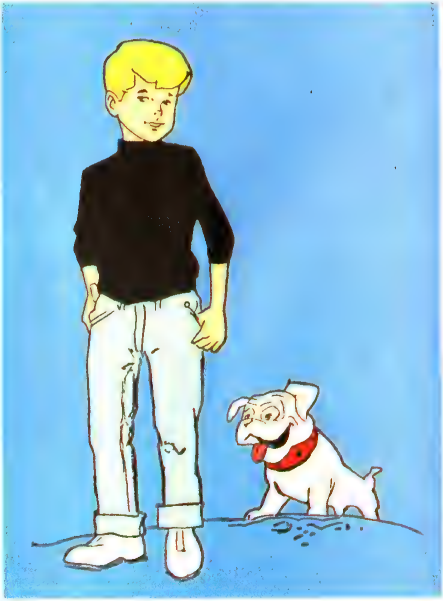
Again, I got a big break there whereby I was allowed to do whatever I wanted to do. Nobody got in the act at all. Anytime anybody got in the act it was generally Joe Barbera and most all of the stuff that he suggested was a plus.

CF: No one ever said that you couldn't do this or that?

WILDEY: No. My assumption was that when you write and draw a comic strip, there is no one between you and the audience. You file your copy every week and they print it and put it in a newspaper, all of course within the bounds of normal good taste. You don't get into too much graphic, horrible stuff. It's just a general storytelling good taste. You never really get edited by anyone in a newspaper syndicate if your stuff is on time and fairly legible, and that was my assumption when I went into television. I had no other training. I hadn't known anything about television and I was immersed in this stuff almost immediately and assumed that this is up to me. I am the guy who tells the story and I never got any network feedback at all on the entire show.

It's a good possibility that maybe Joe Barbera did, or whoever, and maybe they were being polite or discreet or something, but no network person ever told me zilch about *Jonny Quest*.

Career-wise I've made 83 pictures now, all together and after *Jonny Quest* the networks started getting into the act and I've got to tell you that I agree



Jonny Quest and his dog Bandit ©Hanna Barbera

Jonny, Race and Hal ©Hanna-Barbera

to a large extent with what other people consider to be interference. Let me give you an example.

I was a producer at Marvel productions and the idea there was to take the entire Marvel library of characters out of all the Marvel comic books and come up with the strongest ones and make them television characters. There exists at all networks, but I speak specifically of NBC which I know fairly intimately now, what is called an "Emulative Clause." An Emulative Clause is: Can a six year old child actually physically emulate what he sees on a television cartoon show. In other words, can he pick up a .45 and blow his mother away? And the answer is yes. So they have an Emulative Clause there where guns, for instance, are a no-no. You cannot have one person point a gun at another person and shoot them, or even just point it, that I know of. If you follow my reasoning here, this would apply to knives, hand grenades and so forth.

On *The Planet of the Apes* show, I brought them right to the top of the line. It took me two weeks. I went to the mat and we argued and I wanted to know, "When can I get out of the emulative stage?"

They said, "Well look, Doug, you can't have these people carrying clubs."

I said, "Waitaminute. We've got the whole premise of an ape army. You cannot then really show an army. How do you show a soldier without a gun?"

Finally they said, "Look, we'll let you strap the rifle on the guy's back as long as he doesn't touch the rifle." That makes him look like a soldier, graphically.

CF: Doesn't this presuppose that Saturday Morning exists in a vacuum and that the kids who watch it do not watch anything else, whether it be movies, prime time shows or anything which has everything else that Saturday Morning can't have?

WILDEY: Yes, it's the cog in the machine syndrome. In other words we're talking now with executives on Saturday Morning for their network and all they try to do is hold the line in their own little niteh. They say, okay, let the other guy at nighttime take care of his problem, we're taking care of ours.

I'll tell you some of the other things. I wrote the thirteen premises in a saga connecting one show to another on *Planet of the Apes* and it was an evolution from show one to show thirteen. Each one interconnected and evolved as it went along. I had something going involving trucks on a highway and I called it "Death's Highway—Chapter 6". I got a call from the network and they said, "We can't use death in the title." The word death? Are they trying to say that death doesn't exist? Do they not want children to say that there is a thing called death? I'm not sure yet what the reasoning is. I never could figure it out.

But the Emulative Clause went up all the way on the *Planet of the Apes* and we had a very serious meeting and I said, "Gentlemen, it's really not feasible for a six year old boy to pick up a machine gun and kill anybody," and they said, "It could happen though!" An actual six year old child could pick up an actual machine gun and blow somebody away and I was forced to admit that.

CF: But it's illegal for anyone to own a machine gun privately.

WILDEY: Naturally we don't discuss that. That's also true for knife blades in certain states over a certain length and on and on, but on Saturday morning knives are out, clubs are out, pistols are out, machine guns are out.

"Naturally," I said, "a kid could pick up a grenade, pull the pin and kill somebody," and they said, "Yeah, grenades are out."

So the bottom line was, I said, "How about Howitzers?" And they thought it over and they thought it over and they could not figure how a six year old kid could operate a Howitzer, so guess what? In *Planet of the Apes* we had Howitzers up to your elbows. We had them on caissons following jeeps and we had them blowing away mountain tops and we had Howitzers going all the time because the Emulative Clause stopped at a Howitzer. That's what I can tell you about the reasoning behind the networks.

Now getting back to the Marvel business, one of the Marvel characters was the Human Torch. Just the name is bad. Human Torch. That is probably the most likely of all the emulative things that a kid could actually do by simply putting lighter fluid on him and striking a match, and I bought that. I just could not see a six year old kid watching a show called the Human Torch with that kind of a connotation.

The other thing I thought was good was in the Godzilla show. We had a great story about Godzilla who shrinks down. The title was *Micro-Godzilla*, and magically or through some chemical he shrinks down to about six inches high and is confronted by a rat and we have a fight between the six inch Godzilla and this six inch rat. A point was later brought up, by the network again, which I thought was a sharp observance. An audience of small kids is not all middle class kids sitting around the house. Some of them live in tenements in Detroit and New York and Chicago and are of whatever racial origin. And rats are not something that they would consider all that entertaining because rats are part of their every day life. We let the show go because we had done it and it was still a good sequence, but we didn't make too much of it. But I thought about that and I thought also that that made a little bit of sense. Is it entertaining to a five year old Harlem Black kid sitting in a tenement or where ever this show is being seen? A rat is, I guess, not all that entertaining to them. The best we could do was that I made sure the rat took the beating in the fight between he and Godzilla, so that was at least a small blow.

So some of the things the network brings up are not insane, or not, in my opinion, unreasonable. But a lot of them are.

CF. In the case of the Human Torch, they'd already done a Fantastic Four *cartoon show shortly after* Jonny Quest.

WILDEY: Yes, that was syndicated and I happened to work on that show. I was

an art director at that particular studio. As it happened, I did not do the Human Torch segments. I had nothing to do with them and didn't even know they were being done. My part was creating a new five minute show for the Sub-Mariner I Art Directed that Sub-Mariner show and across the street they were doing some of the other shows in which they would take the drawings out of the comic books and animate them from that. But that was a syndicated show. It was not network. And again, things at that point were a lot more lenient.

I wrote and laid out a number of bridge segments for the Iron Man segments as well.

At the time, of course, let's face it, I wasn't the great seer because these things never occurred to me. My assumption at the time was that anything that comes out of a comic book, that the kid can buy for a dime, would probably be okay for free television. That was the thought at the time. I never concerned myself with the Human Torch at that time but later I did when it was explained to me. Somehow I thought that was the worst of any adaptation from a comic book—something called The Human Torch. And I thought the concern made sense when it was brought up to me by a network person. For what it's worth, I felt that in some cases the concerns were valid.

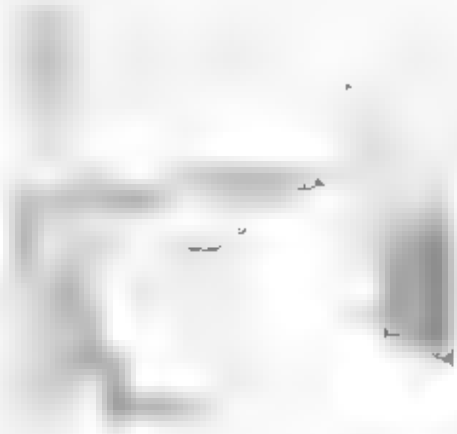
There are some things that I considered totally invalid and absolutely ridiculous. I was involved at Hanna-Barbera with a show that I was supposed to produce called *The Thing* another Stan Lee/Marvel character—a thing made out of rocks.

CF: That had to do with a kid who turned into The Thing by using something called a "Thing Ring"?

WILDEY: I thought that it was a straight show based on the comic book where it's short of a Hulk-type character except that it's seemingly made out of rocks. As it turned out, Stan Lee came through and I conferred with him several times and they had taken sort of a funny approach to the show. It was a Popeye show type of thing and I don't do that style, so I handed it off to another producer.

But the idea was that they had one motorcycle sequence in it whereby a bunch of thugs do something and The Thing chases them on a motorcycle and we laid it out and handed it in to animation before I got the call from the network Standards and Practices people. Again, it was the Emulative Cause. "We have to have The Thing wear a helmet," they said. "A safety helmet when he rides the motorcycle."

Now here's this big thing, who's indestructible, made out of rock, riding a motorcycle, but the network insists on putting a helmet on him because if a kid sees something on television



where somebody's riding a motorcycle without a helmet, he's going to do it too. I think that's ridiculous. I think it's crazy, and yet at that point I stopped production on that show and we went back and put it through layout again and had a helmet on The Thing.

It's a question of there's nothing you can do. You're fighting air time every minute, you've got to get this show out and regardless of what your feeling is, you're going to do it if you want to get this show on the air and keep this factory running, so you're going to put a helmet on him.

CF: When NBC reran Jonny Quest *a couple years ago, did they censor the episodes?*

WILDEY: Oh yes. Every one. I was kind of teed-off about that. I wasn't teed-off about their censoring it, chopping out what they called "the objectionable parts", but rather because I wasn't consulted on the cutting. They got another guy to do that, and that bothered me. I thought, perhaps that I could have done a little slicker job of editing here and there, but I guess they didn't want the original creator to get into that kind of thing.

I saw a couple of the cut versions once. A local collector showed me a tape of the original version and then he showed me the cut version. I happened to write this particular show and the scene concerned some sharks and Race Bannon with his machine gun. A Chinese cook on a ship falls overboard and the sharks are surrounding him and so Race cuts loose with his machine gun to either kill or scare away the sharks, which seemed logical to me. But they took out the entire shooting of the sharks scene and there was no gun and the guy just goes overboard screaming and we cut to the sharks and then it just cuts to them pulling the guy back aboard the ship. They took the whole sequence out so that nobody ever knew what happened and it was rather poorly cut. I think they could have done it a little slicker than that.

CF: So you don't think that Jonny Quest *is ever going to be revived in any form?*

WILDEY: You mean as a new show? I really don't know. I think anything can if it's strong enough, it just takes a long time. I specifically remember *Star Trek* and all those years with people screaming to bring it back. The developer and the guiding hand through the whole thing wasn't making out too well, either career-wise or financially during all of this time but finally I guess it became enough of a money making situation where they

figured there would be a big profit in it and finally went ahead and had the good sense to get Gene Roddenberry on the project because he was the Doug Wildey, let us say, of *Star Trek*. He was the guy who was interested in it, who guided it and tried to keep it going.

CF: I thought it was amusing that Tim Matheson, who did the voice of Jonny Quest had a featured role in Animal House.

WILDEY: He was a superb actor when he was working on *Jonny Quest* and still is a very good actor. The material some people get is questionable, but I think he's a good actor. He did well on television also in a show called, oddly enough, *The Quest*, which was a western. I always liked him and always liked his work. He was a thoroughgoing professional, as all of them are. I never had a problem with an actor.

CF: How old was he when he did the voice of Jonny Quest?

WILDEY: It's debateable. He was driving a car when he came in to record the show. He looked like he was thirteen. I'm not sure, but he had to be sixteen, I think, because he was driving a car but he didn't look sixteen.

CF: Are there any photos around of any of them from time they were recording the voices?

WILDEY: There might be. There were some newspaper articles which filtered through from time to time from Kansas City and whatever paper decided to do an article on the show and they'd occasionally have pictures of the actors and so forth.

In that particular case, I chose the actors for the parts and there was no one who was what you would call an outstanding, household name type of star. The studio did employ, of course, "Mr. Voice", Mel Blanc, but he was not on this show. In this particular case I picked Mike Road for Race and we switched voices for Dr. Quest because we needed more of a change as the other actor's voice had sounded too much like Race's, and so we went with Don Messick to finally play the father.

Following *Jonny Quest* I worked on about seven other shows for Hanna-Barbera. There was *Hercules*, the cave man types of shows.

CF: Did you work on Hercules *or the* Herculoids?

WILDEY: On *The Herculoids* and then there was one called *Hercules* about a kid with a lion, and a few other shows.

CF: How much did Alex Toth have to do with Jonny Quest?

WILDEY: Alex came in about show number eleven and did his usual superb number for a number of shows.

The one I personally liked the best I wrote the script on. I did split screen-play plus premise on "Shadow of the Condor", about the bi-planes. Warren Tufts was working on it and he was an airplane freak and he did most of the layouts, about eighty percent of them, on that particular show. I did the writing, dialogue, etc., and I thought it was probably the best of the Quests. The story kept moving. The artwork was good graphics Not very much animation, but a lot of camera work.

In one instance I was a guest at a convention speaking on *Jonny Quest* and I brought that particular episode with me to show.

Jonny Quest was supposed to be the first in a long line of adventure shows done for prime time. It was very primitive compared to what we had planned which would have followed had it been a success.

Dr. Quest and his son Jonny, dog Bandit and friends Hadji and Race ©Hanna Barbera

Continued from page 10

one."

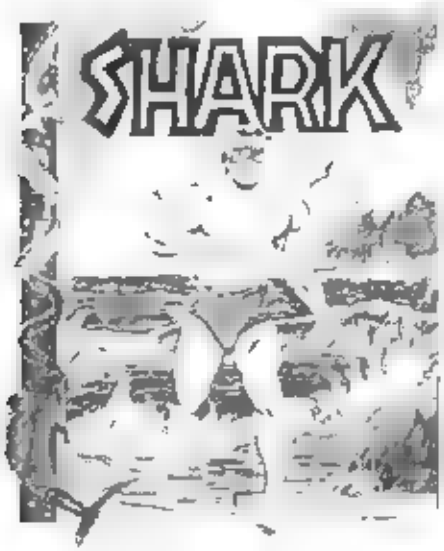
One of the amazing things about Amazing-Man was that he was in business for over six months before he received a costume. His origin was pretty amazing, too. It happened like this—"25 years ago, in the mountains of Tibet, the Council of Seven selected an orphan of superb physical structure, and each did his part to develop in the child all the qualities of one who would dominate the world by his great strength, knowledge, and courage... His friend Nika, the young chemist, endowed him with the power to make himself disappear in a cloud of green vapor, and extracted from him the promise to always be good and kind and generous." Before graduating and being sent to America to combat evil, Aman had to undergo a series of tests that make your average college midterm or IRS tax form look like snaps. Among the hurdles Aman overcomes is a tug-o-war with a bull elephant and a tussle with a cobra while his hands are manacled behind his back. The chief snag to an uncomplicated career of crime stopping is a rogue member of the Council itself. A sinister hooded figure, with the power of mental telepathy, the Great Question "covets plans of dire evil for the boy."

In Issue #11 Aman finally shows up in costume—having worked mostly in a business suit prior to this—which a caption describes as "his Tibetan uniform". Why anyone in the snowcapped vastness of Tibet would've gone around wearing nothing but a pair of blue shorts and a small shield with an A engraved on it strapped to his chest is never explained. Having given his hero a costume, Everett moved on to other things. He never gave Aman the attention he was to devote to his major creation, the Sub-Mariner. In fact, quite a bit of the artwork in *Amazing-Man Comics* that bears his name was ghosted by Sam Gilman. Sam Gilman, whose style was identical to that of his brother Lew back then, took over and stayed with the feature until its demise. He used the penname Sam Decker. Just as Aman was slow to get a super suit, he took quite awhile to acquire a boy sidekick. He got around to doing that in #23 (August, 1941) and his youthful companion was named Tommy, rather less than more dynamic.

Carl Burgos' contribution to *Amazing-Man Comics* was a somewhat bizarre superguy known as the Iron Skull. Since Burgos was fond of androids and synthetic men (such as his Human Torch and White Streak), it seems safe to assume that the Skull was some sort of robot. This was never made crystal clear, although we were treated to many depictions of bullets and knives bouncing merrily off his coco. His fists were capable of smashing through walls. Outwardly a wavyhaired blond chap who did his crime busting in a business suit, the Skull's only spooky features are a flat, triangular nose and lidless cat-type eyes. The strip takes place in what was then the future, the distant 1970s. We're told in an early caption, "Crime wave followed crime wave after the great World War of 1950...Leaders, trying to bring back law and order, had to fight ruthless and powerful gangsters who almost controlled the world—it was then a strange man appeared...a man against

whose head bullets flattened...it was—THE IRON SKULL!" When Burgos abandoned his hardheaded hero with #11, the Skull took two months off. He returned in #14, rendered now by the less than nimble pen of Sam Gilman. The Iron Skull no longer operated in the future and the strip lacked the exuberant wackiness Burgos had imbued it with.

The new magazine also had an aquatic hero of the Sub-Mariner sort. Named the Shark, he surfaced in #6 (October, 1939) and was described as the "king of all sea-life", a sort of underwater Tarzan. In the ocean he "has the strength of ten whales and can swim as fast as the same." The Shark was also "gifted with a strong sense of hypnosis. He can make an image of himself appear out of any water as if he were a genie." If you go by cover dates, the Shark hit the newsstands a month before the Sub-Mariner reached a national audience by way of the first issue of *Marvel Mystery Comics*. However, Prince Namor was apparently seen by at least a handful of people in the earlier, abortive



Motion Picture Funnies Weekly. The artist on the Shark was Lew Glanzman, who called himself Lew Glanz in those days.

A gag cartoonist before and since, Martin Filchock tried his hand at adventure fare while working for Jacquet. His longest running hero was Mighty Man, a blond fellow who performed his super deeds while wearing blue slacks, a red shirt and sensible work shoes. Originally he was described as "a twelve-foot super-giant who was found in a hidden valley in California," and left his peaceful home "to wage war on criminals" In issue #12 (March, 1940), though, he encounters a dedicated scientist who operates on him and endows him with a new set of superpowers. Mighty Man now possesses "the miraculous ability to grow and shrink at will" and to change his features.

What Filchock had stumbled onto, nearly a year and a half before the advent of that red-clad and rubbery crimefighter in *Police Comics*, was the basic notion of Plastic Man. Unfortunately he was neither the artist nor the writer that Jack Cole was. The adventures he fashioned for his shapechanging hero are routine. His artwork has a crude, cartoony charm, but it's not compelling enough to compensate for the prosaic plots. Mighty Man succumbed after #25 (December, 1941). In his final days he was involved with a pretty, blonde villainess called the Witch and with a pretty, blonde heroine who had the nifty name of Super Ann.

In addition to a sometime giant, the magazine also boasted a midget. Matter of fact, in Minimidget there were two teenie weenie people, the titular hero and his pretty female companion. Only a few inches high, Minimidget and Fitty, also known as the Super Midgets, had adventures similar to those enjoyed by Doll Man over in *Feature Comics*. The differences were that they worked in civilian clothes (no doubt bought at a toy shop) and remained small all of the time. The tiny team battled everything from gangsters to robots and often traveled about in their own model airplane. John F Kolb, who did little else in comics, was the artist and his work had a youthful, homebrewed appearance.

Other strange and off-beat characters came and went. There was Zardi, also called the Prince of Zandipore and the Eternal Man, who may have been 15,000 years old. We were told, "World explorers have long whispered a story too fantastic to be written. Yet it is true! There is alive today a MAN whom death cannot touch. Scientists say he must have solved the secret of certain life-giving sun rays, learned to direct them into his body. WE DO NOT KNOW. WE CAN ONLY WONDER!" Although at times the Eternal Man looked like an old coot, by simply slipping his magic cape over his stooping

Dr. Hypno

shoulders he took on the semblance of youth. When in this mode he could've passed for Mandrake without a moustache.

For a few issues *Amazing-Man Comics* also housed The Magician From Mars. This was a science fiction opus, dealing with a skimpily clad blonde young woman named Jane. "Born of Earth and Martian parents," she "received supernatural powers as a baby when accidently exposed to a cathode ray. She uses her powers against the forces of evil and for the betterment of the world."

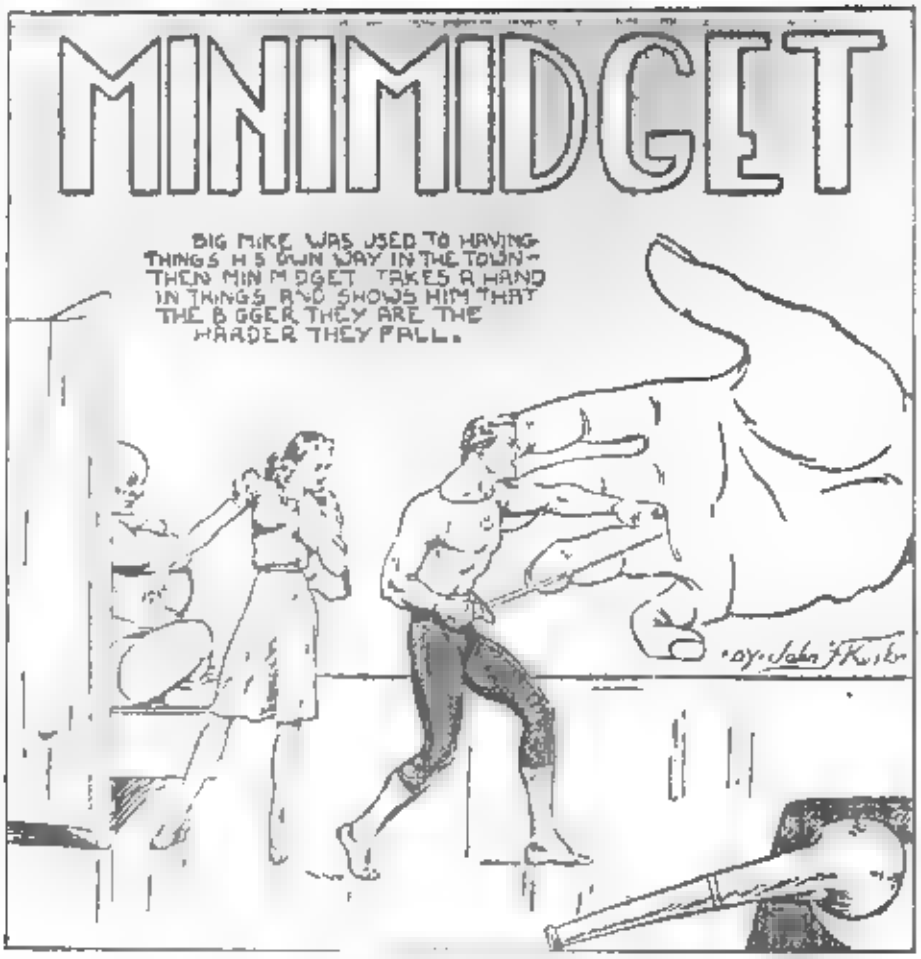
Joe Simon, working solo, drew Ranch Dude, a Western, for one issue. Among the other shortlived early features were King of the South Seas, The Strange Dr. Watkins and The Cat Man. This last was by Tarpe Mills, creator of the flamboyant Miss Fury, and dealt not with a costumed superhero but with a suave private detective who was a cat fancier.

Although he was basically a big foot cartoonist, Frank Thomas' earliest work in comic books was more or less straight adventure stuff. His first professional feature was Chuck Hardy for *Amazing-Man Comics* and it ran from issues #5 through #13. Chuck was a husky dark-haired fellow who adventured in "the strange land of Aquatania, below the ocean bottom," with a pretty red-haired young woman named Jerry. When this one ended Thomas came up with Dr. Hypno. Many years later Thomas recalled that "Dr. Hypno was originally titled Dr. Psycho—until we discovered our young readers were calling him 'Doctor Plasko'. That called for a hurry-up change." Although this makes a nice story, it doesn't happen to be true. Possibly Thomas was remembering an editorial objection to his original title. Dr. Hypno never appeared in print under any other name.

The good doctor had a rather unusual knack. "By hypnotism, he is able to transfer his powerful mentality to the body of any lower living form! Thus, in the guise of a dog, cat or bird," Hypno pursued a sideline as a detective and crimebuster. He was a tall man with a rather oddly shaped head and in the course of his career Dr. Hypno transposed his mind into some unlikely host bodies. These included those of a parrot, a gorilla, a bat, an organ grinder's monkey and an elephant.

In the magazine's second year Bob Lubbers began drawing Reef Kinkaid, the hero of which was a "gentleman adventurer, explorer and soldier of fortune." Reef encountered everything from international intrigue to lost civilizations in his brief nine issue career. Dash Dartwell came along, shortly before Reef departed, for a brief stay. Thanks to "Professor Moss' metabo-accelerator pills, which speed up all the life processes and give their user unbelievable speed," Dash found he was able to "dodge bullets and outdistance speeding cars." When Dash used his pep pills to fight crime, you couldn't fault him. However, he also popped the stuff when he went out and broke track and athletic records. Nobody said anything at the time, but today a doping jock would be ruled off the field.

From issue #21 and #23 four more new characters showed up, none surviving beyond one issue. T.N.T. was a young scientist who "succeeds in his experiments to smash the atom." Anxious to use "the atom's tremendous power to sweep the world clean of crime and rackets," he constructs an



atom gun and conceals "his identity behind a distinctive uniform." The distinctive uniform featured yellow tunic, blue tights, red boots, cape and cowl. Next came the Voice, a man of mystery who "can pitch his voice almost inaudibly or as loud as a cannon, and with its vibrations can shatter stone or steel." Following him was the Marksman, another costumed fellow who "has the eyesight of an eagle and a pair of wonderful hands. Whether he shoots a gun or an arrow, whether he throws a ball or a knife HE NEVER MISSES!!" He did miss, though, as far as catching on in comics and so did Miraco the Great. Billed as "Magician and Mystic", this tuxedo and moustache wizard was drawn by Sven Elven, a veteran of DC's earliest titles.

The formidable Basil Wolverton contributed Meteor Martin to #25 and #26. Meteor, one of Wolverton's few blond-haired heroes, worked out of an American observatory on the moon. As a side effect of being zapped by the obliterator rays of a fleet of invading Martians, he is transported over into a parallel world. "The Martian's blast ray disrupts atoms in such a way that all objects are turned into a negative condition," explains a scientist who's had a similar experience, "and enter this negative universe!" This negative universe is fairly close to Wolverton's positive universe, being rich in warty flora and fauna, forests of giant carrots and asparagus, aliens who somewhat resemble ambulatory private parts. The strip was a continued one and in the second installment Meteor, after rushing into a dismal cave to rescue the scientist's lovely daughter, ends up being heaved into a firey pit by a gang of creatures who look like nasty cousins of the Michelin Man. "How can Meteor Martin, plunging toward death in the flaming pit, possibly save Rana?" asks the final caption. You wonder if Wolverton knew in advance there wasn't going to be a third installment.

The parade of new characters continued until *Amazing-Man Comics* ceased publication with #27 (February, 1942). None of the heroes who came aboard just prior to the sinking of the magazine were very interesting. From Frank Follo, one of the Golden Age's least gifted artists, came the Blue Lady. In reality she was Lucille Martin, "a snappy young writer." Donning her costume, which included a hat that looked like a nesting bluebird, she was transformed into a very insipid crimefighter. Nightshade, like the aforementioned Lady, arrived in #24 (October, 1941). His peculiar ability was having a shadow that had a life of its own. To assure himself of always casting a shadow, the whitesuited Nightshade wore a flashlight strapped to his ankle.

Until our next column all you junior scientists out there can figure out how the devil you'd get *that* to work in real life.

JOHN BUSCEMA

Continued from page 28

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PLANCHE 5

CHARLIE CHAPLIN

This aspect of humor in *Conan* interests John greatly. He sees Conan as essentially different from modern man. He wouldn't find verbal jokes so funny, perhaps, but he might favor slapstick. "His sense of humor?" John mused. "Well, if a guy stumbles on a spear and impales himself, maybe that's funny to him. Because the guy was a klutz, or whatever. Conan is a *barbarian*. I don't think he'd laugh at Bob Hope jokes! I think he might laugh at Charlie Chaplin, at visual humor.

"They have Conan analyzing things. He isn't the type who analyzes things, he *acts*. I've known people like that. He has a simple way of looking at things. He's a barbarian," he emphasizes again. "He has no education, he's never gone to school. He lives by his wits. But they have him doing things that Sherlock Holmes would do. He can't figure out how a magician does this or that—no way! Conan can't sit back and analyze things. Maybe he has the ability, but he doesn't do it. He *won't* do it."

GREAT PAINTINGS

Although *Conan* is virtually John's only work right now, he recently drew a page for a portfolio of "the world's greatest comic book artists" which came out in France. He enjoyed his trip overseas and loves Europe. Being of Italian descent, he is enchanted with Italy, and speaks highly of most of the countries that he visited. He admits he'd love to work over there, given a chance.

"I've been thinking about doing something different," he said. "As soon as I finish that graphic novel. If I finally get to it!" He laughed at the thought of the much-promised book. "I'd like to do something away from the barbarian thing."

How does John relax from his long day at the art table? "I love reading art books," he grinned. "I've got a big collection of them. You should see Don Heck's collection, though—I drool every time I go over! He's got this huge wall, all filled with art books! If I had to live my life over again, I'd be a painter.

"People ask, 'Who do you like?', but it's like music. You like Beethoven, you like Brahms, you like Mendelssohn, all of them. I cannot go through a day without music. I listen to them all, and enjoy every one. I can't say *everything*—I don't like anything before Mozart. Bach I just can't take. But Mozart on, I can live with any of that.

"It's the same thing with paintings. Mention any painter! I've been to Europe several times, and I'll go, say, to the Louvre. You've got to see the museums, or what's the point in going?" he asked. I heartily agreed, being a museum addict myself. "And I see paintings, *great* paintings and I have never even heard of some of these artists. Beautiful, unbelieveable paintings. There are thousands of painters over the years that did great work, and we don't even know that they lived. There are so many great paintings around, really. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (in New York), is loaded with them.

"There's a picture there, a French impressionist I think, and it's a guy looking in a mirror. He looks like a dandy, and is dressed in a bowler hat. It was done at the turn of the century, and is the most beautiful painting you could imagine. You hear about Manet, Monet, Degas, but there are other ones. I love them all, every one.

"Recently I came across a small book by an amazing artist, a Hungarian. I had to buy the book. But I had never heard of him until I came across that book. I can really get lost in art!"

This brought him back to his own youth, when he was captivated by art for the first time. "There was a time," he said, "that if people didn't work like Norman Rockwell, forget it. I thought Norman Rockwell was the end when I was in high school. Then I was exposed to Van Gogh, and to Manet, and they didn't work like Rockwell, so they weren't as good. Then I went to the extreme—I became Van Gogh crazy. And all my Norman Rockwells, years of illustrations—I tore up and threw away. You go from one extreme to another when you're young. As you get older, you realise that every one of them is good. Norman Rockwell is good for what he does, Van Gogh is great for what he does, and you have to attempt to understand what they are trying to accomplish. Now I kick myself for Having thrown away all those Norman Rockwells! But when you're young, there's only black-and-white, no gray."

PRINCE VALIANT

Not all of his taste runs to the classic painters and artists. He also strongly admires the earlier illustrators of the comic strip. "I did the same thing with Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant*," he said regretfully. "I had hundreds of them that I saved from the New York *Journal*. Don Heck has them all, I think. He has a collection that's unbelieveable! I had them as a kid, but I grew beyond comics, and I threw everything away. I could kick myself—they're paying a fortune for it nowadays.

"I read the other day that one of Norman Rockwell's paintings—and not really one of his better ones—went for half a million dollars. And there was a time when he was giving them away to people as gifts! Probably if you had asked Hal Foster, he'd have given you original pages of *Prince Valiant*. They used to give them away for nothing. I knew guys who worked up at the syndicate who were taking his stuff and giving it to their friends. Now a Hal Foster full page runs for three thousand!

"When I read comics as a kid, the only comics that were valid to me were *Prince Valiant*—Hal Foster—Alex Raymond and Burne Hogarth. These were the only three I could tolerate in comics. Again, it was a matter of black-and-white. All the other guys didn't measure up to Hal Foster and Alex Raymond. Raymond was a supreme draftsman, but although it was drawn beautifully, it just didn't have the life of Hal Foster. Foster may not have been the draftsman that Raymond was, but his stuff had much more life to it. You can respond to his material. I think the greatest strip ever drawn in comics is *Prince Valiant*. No, you can't call it comics, it's illustration—pure illustration.

Here Buscema instills some of the grandeur and majesty of Thor's Asgardian setting.

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John Buscema's Silver Surfer became cult classic. His popularity lives long after the demise of his book.

"I was at one of those lunches once where they honored Hal Foster, and they asked him how long he spent working on a page. And he said fifty hours a week—on one page!" In Spain, he met a comics artist who spends two days on a page, producing beautiful work—but gets paid just the same rate that John gets for the same period of time and four times the volume!

MODERN TIMES

We talked about comic work that he admires now. "Joe Kubert," he offered promptly. "I was talking to some of the guys in New York a few months ago, discussing which books sell and why. I was surprised to find out just how well some of the books are selling. They do nothing to me, I get them every month and look at them—nothing. But I look at a Joe Kubert book...". He leaned forward for emphasis. "I hate the guy's guts, he's so good! I hate him!" He broke into laughter. "He's the master today, to me. He's got the whole thing, he knows how to do it.

"There is one book that I enjoy looking at," he said on reflection. "I enjoy looking at the drawings because I think the guy is one of the best draftsmen in the business. That's *Atari Force*, by Garcia Lopez. This guy is a draftsman. I don't know how long he's been in the field, but he's doing some terrific stuff." Oddly enough, Don Heck had also mentioned to me that he enjoyed Garcia Lopez's work. "One of the reasons is that we're artists," John explained. "We look at the draftsmanship, the composition, how the guy tells the story. We look at all these things, where the average reader doesn't.

"We've got a unique thing in comics that no other publication has. We've got to appeal to people from seven to thirty years old. There is no book on the market, no publication, that has that kind of spectrum of age. And we have to depend on those readers. The majority of our readers are teenagers, from ten through college. It's tough. If you get one group, one age, it's not enough to support a book. You have to get them all. And I don't know how it's done. I don't think anybody knows how it's done, because if we did every book would be a winner!

"I think one of the dullest books today is *Superman*," he observed. "And yet it sells. Why? The reputation? It's been selling for forty years. Another dull book is *Spider-Man*. Well, maybe not now, because they've changed the costume. I haven't read it recently, but they have a beautiful costume, I will say that. It's a tremendous improvement. But before the new costume came out, *Spider-Man* was a best-selling book. Why? I don't understand."

I mentioned the introspection so favored in comics nowadays as adding to the dullness of them. "The entire industry is being worked by fans," he agreed. "I didn't grow up on comics. Jack Kirby didn't grow up on comics—he *started* comics! Syd Shore didn't grow up on comics, nor did Joe Kubert, John Romita or Gene Colan. None of us did. We worked in it, but we didn't grow up in it.

"They take it all so seriously. There's no humor in it, no tongue-in-cheek. No way! This is all serious stuff to them. Maybe that's what's selling, I don't know. None of us as kids ever saved books. We'd read them and throw them away, or we'd trade them. That's it. Then the fans came in...".

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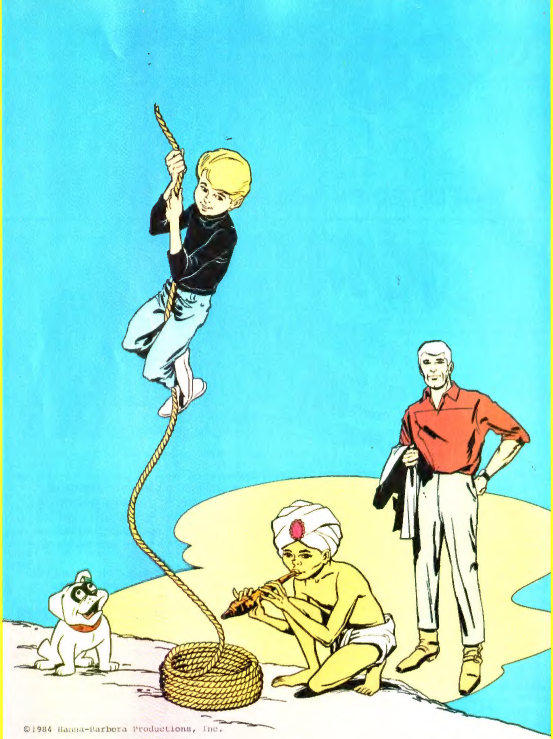
We would like to thank John Buscema for kindly allowing us to illustrate this interview with the full-page artwork that he has provided. Also for his humorous and enlightening interview, when he was probably itching to get back to his drawing board!



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